

**BILL  
'TAKES  
THE  
HELM**



# BILL TAKES THE HELM

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## *Chapter 1*

### *GINGER*

THE fourth of August, the date Bill Walton had set for the launching, was one of the summer's loveliest days. It was not sultry with heat rising in waves from the roads; it was crisp and cool and breezy. The meadows glistened after the night's rain; the water of Long Island Sound, which could be seen from the higher parts of the town, shone and frothed invitingly; and the birds sang with special fervour.

The day of the launching, the boys and girls who had strolled down to go swimming by the pier came back before the afternoon was half over. They raced in and out of their houses and clustered on the street corners, talking about the boat Bill Walton had found wrecked by a storm, and which he had bought from its owner and rebuilt. The boys who knew Bill best hurried along Brambly Lane and down the Waltons' drive to the garage where the boat perched high on her four lations. Gleaming in her new paint she looked as if she were straining to be on her way. There were shouts through the open garage door.

"She's a beauty, Bill!"

"Is she nearly ready?"

"You'd better hurry up. There're crowds all over the place waiting to see her go by. It'll be like a parade!"

"Come on, Bill, it's nearly four o'clock, and you said she'd be ready by three!"

Bill Walton and his best friend, Jim Barstow, were working in feverish haste, polishing and tidying, rigging the new mainsail and jib, trying them out, so they could

hoist them quickly when they felt Long Island Sound under them as they would in only a few minutes' time. They did not stop to speak to each other, but glowed in the excitement of knowing that the work was nearly done. There was no flaw in the new planking; the seams were true and tight with their caulking. They had sanded and painted the boat inside and out as carefully as if she were the most precious ornament. They could see nothing to change when they jumped down to examine the half-black, half-orangy-red hull, with the careful white line dividing the colours, the little American flag, and the boat's name in big gold letters, *GINGER*. The two boys grinned at each other, and Bill gave the word which brought a chorus of delighted shouts. Footsteps crunched along the drive as the boys chosen to help with the carrying hurried to the garage.

In a moment *Ginger* moved away from her foundations and through the garage door. She seemed to glide forward, to sweep triumphantly out into the sunshine, out between the lines of rose trees along the drive, out on to the lane past the Waltons' white hungalow, past the dark house set back among the trees where the Professor, the Waltons' nearest neighbour, lived. The procession turned the corner to the right and moved quickly through the centre of the town towards the Sound. All along the way, the boys and girls on the corners, the women out shopping, the men in their shop doorways and office windows, smiled and waved.

Supporting one side of the stern on his back, Bill walked bent forward because he was the tallest of the boys carrying *Ginger*. As he walked, he dreamed of how he and Jim would sail her, of where they would go, and how they would study the little sailing boat till they could make her answer every command. Bill had been dreaming about boats ever since he had been old enough to climb into one. He had spent hours in the boat-building yards at the edge of the town, and there was no book about boats in the

library which he had not read two or three times. For years he had wished and prayed for such a sailing boat. It still seemed too wonderful to be true. Now as he walked, he thought again about her new rudder, about the amount of sail he and Jim had bought for her. Had they made her keel deep enough? Would she prove steady as well as swift in a strong wind? The buzz of talk around him, the cries of admiration, the cheers, came from a world outside Bill's. But the boys walking at Bill's side heard what was said as *Ginger* moved through the town.

"Mighty nice! She looks a perfect job, right down to the last detail."

"She'll be the best little ship on the Sound!"

"That boy would make a success of anything. He'll go far, you'll see. This town will be proud of Bill Walton some day!"

Halfway to the Sound, the procession stopped, and *Ginger* was shifted to the shoulders of a second group of boys, as Bill and Jim had planned. Bill did not feel tired; he could have continued all the way to the pier, but he gave his place to Snowy, one of the boys in the school football team, and walked behind. A man called out: "All you need now is a brass band!" And some of the younger boys brought out their harmonicas and played *Tankee Doodle*. They began to play almost at the moment the parade reached the hospital.

Bill looked across the wide grounds and up at the corner room where his mother had been lying since she had been brought to the hospital two months before. As he passed the gateway, he kept his eyes on his mother's window, watching the white curtains fluttering through the narrow place where the window was open. On pleasant days the nurses would roll his mother's bed so that she could see out and could see Bill and his sister, Merrie, as they came along the drive for their daily visit. Mother knew about the launchin'. She would be at the window, Bill knew, if she

were well enough. But, he told himself, he had known when he and Merrie had visited her in the morning that she would not be. She had not been at the window for a week now, and it seemed that, though she smiled and talked, her breathing had grown slow and hesitant, as if she were always hiding a sigh.

The pier, which was a continuation of the town's main street, was like a wide brown ribbon flung out into the Sound. Before the boardwalk reached the water, it was lined with stands where frozen custards, hot dogs, popcorn and pop were for sale. This afternoon it was crowded with summer people, with families who had come to the shore from farther inland. The crowds made a pathway and watched as the band of boys carrying *Ginger* moved along the boardwalk, down a short stairway and across an asphalt square lined with sheds and bathhouses, then on to a low jetty where rowboats and canoes were moored. The boys in front crouched down to lower the sailing boat and the boys in the back tipped her stern sharply. She slid into the water and sprang up, rocking and bobbing. Bill and Jim jumped aboard, and with their friends' shouts in their ears, pushed off, shooting out into the Sound without touching the other boats. Jim stepped the rudder while Bill hoisted sail, pulling the boom carefully over and letting out the mainsheet.

The wind caught at *Ginger* and carried her smoothly forward on the first part of the trial run Bill and Jim had been planning for weeks now. Both boys had on bathing trunks under their white duck trousers, ready for diving overboard when they anchored on the far side of Scots' Island. And their rakes were in the cockpit, for digging round clams in the shallow water of Scots' Bay. Bill lifted his head, feeling the sun on his face and the wind ruffling his thick auburn hair, watching the pull of the sheet and the tiller, listening to the "whish" of water under *Ginger's* forefoot.

"She's so light and smooth, Bill!" Jim cried as the little boat gathered speed. "You've just got to enter her in the races next summer. I'll bet she could win in any wind!"

Bill smiled his agreement, and he and Jim sailed on, working in harmony as they were used to doing all the summers they had rowed and canoed and sailed together.

Then Bill thought of his mother, not in the way he had been thinking of her during the weeks when he had been rebuilding the boat, when every blow of the hammer and every stroke of the saw had told him that his mother would soon be well again. As he and Jim sailed away into the Sound, Bill's thoughts turned to fear— it was the dread that had been growing secretly since he had seen his mother that morning. Now it pressed against him till the palms of his hands grew cold and damp; and though he tried to push it away, breathing deeply, even humming and whistling to drive it away, it came back again and again till, half an hour after he and Jim had set sail, he mumbled:

"Jim, I've got to go back. I—I've got a lot to do at home. It's going to take too long to go round the island."

Anyone but Jim would have protested. After all their work, after all their plans, the way they had talked it all over, deciding what they would do, just to turn around would have seemed too much.

"Sure, Bill, sure." Jim kept his surprise out of his voice. "We'll take her out again tomorrow. Come to think of it, I've a lot to do myself." Yet they sailed on a distance, with Bill at the tiller, and Jim was beginning to think his friend had changed his mind. He studied the tense figure. It would be better to say nothing. Then the call came.

"O.K., then, ready about!" Bill swung the tiller over. Jim ducked, and the boom whipped across, making the boat heel suddenly, turn, pick herself up, and beat back against the wind.

The return trip took more than an hour. Waves chopped

against *Ginger's* bows and clouds roved overhead, darkening the water with their shadows. When the cluster of yachts and sailing boats belonging to the shore people was a few yards away, Jim drew the mainsail taut, then let it out again till it flapped. *Ginger* slid more and more slowly towards the new buoy the two boys had anchored for her. Next Jim stepped forward to bring down the jib. The boat rounded in the wind and brushed softly against her buoy, and while Jim moored her, Bill lowered the mainsail. Jim helped to gather the sails and stow them, wrapping their canvas covers securely around them.

Finally, lifting the rudder inboard, the boys climbed into Jim's dinghy and rowed towards the boathouse at the edge of Barstows' lawn. Taking off their plimsolls and stepping out into shallow water, they pulled the dinghy on to the shore, lifted it and carried it into the boathouse, leaving it next to the Barstows' big sleek speedboat. Bill and Jim parted then, but Jim took only a few steps towards the rambling white house overlooking the Sound before he turned back to watch his friend mount the steps to the pier, stopping at the top step to put on his plimsolls, and hurry out of sight.

One of the boys who had helped came dashing up. "What's happened, Jim? Why are you back so soon?"

"I don't know really," said Jim, still gazing after Bill.

"I hope nothing."

"Yes," said Jim heavily, "you and me both."

Bill picked his way in and out among the crowds on the pier and strode quickly into the town. At the gates of the hospital, he lingered to look up again at his mother's window, closed and dark now, with its curtains hanging limply inside. There were no cars and no ambulances along the circular drive to the entrance. With the sun gone, the lawns sloping down to the road were grey and damp-looking, and the fallen leaves were dark scraps tumbling and whirling.



A cold stillness closed in around Bill as he entered the hospital gateway. The U-shape of the building before him was like heavy arms reaching out, and he was in deep shadow when he climbed the stone steps to the entrance. He let himself through a glass-panelled door and stood before the reception desk. The pleasant young woman who usually sat there was gone; the hall was deserted. In the silence as Bill waited, fear seemed ready to spring from behind every corridor door. He lifted his hand to the bell on the reception desk, but drew it back again, and looking hurriedly around, walked away, out of the door, along the drive, and through the gates, faster and faster till he was running through the town. People stared after him curiously. He turned into Brambly Lane, but did not go to the little white bungalow, for that had been closed and locked since his mother had been taken away. He pelted towards the large brown house where the Professor lived. And as he ran, he could hear his heart beating, as if it were a thing outside him trying to keep time with the thumping of his feet.

## *Chapter 2*

### BAD NEWS

THE sound of piano music was faint and far away as Bill ran along the Professor's drive and crossed the porch of the big brown house; but when he opened the front door, the music came from every corner, trying to coax away his fear. He walked quickly across the hall and entered the library, a long panelled room, its walls lined ceiling-high with books. The Professor was seated at the grand piano before the French windows. The lamplight shining on his white hair and on his face was soft and peaceful, like his music. Tumbles, Merrie's black-and-white kitten, lay sound asleep on the piano bench at the old man's side.

It was not till Bill was halfway across the room, near the grey stone fireplace where a log fire was burning, that he noticed his sister. She was beginning her "Flowers Awaken", the dance she had been learning in Miss Castle's class for four-year-olds. She knelt hunched forward on the hearthrug, with her head between her arms, then raised herself, lifting her hands, wobbling till she stood on tiptoe. Her face was screwed up, and she was holding her eyes shut as the teacher had ordered, but her eyelids kept flickering open. She pointed one tiny black ballet slipper, and danced in hops and skips in a circle. As she drew away from the firelight, all that showed clearly were her hobbling curls, the white-gold ringlets that won the admiration of everyone who saw them.

"Bill!" She caught sight of her brother and ran to him. The music softened but did not stop, and Bill caught

Merrie in his arms, chuckling in his happiness. Everything was all right. There had been no need for him to be afraid about Mother after all.

Carrying Merrie to the piano, Bill stood holding her, waiting for the Professor to finish the Chopin study he was playing. Everyone knew the Professor was particular about not being disturbed while in the middle of a piece of music. Though he was eighty years old, and had given his last concert ten years before, he still played with extreme care, as if he were performing before thousands of people in a great hall. He still wore the dark suits and the stiff white shirts and grey silk ties he had worn as a lecturer at the University. His bright, piercing eyes caught people's attention and made young people half afraid of him.

When the last chord of the Chopin music had died away, the Professor nodded to Bill.

"Good evening, boy. We didn't expect you back so soon." His voice was a deep bass, each word clear and correct.

"I—we decided not to sail around the Island, sir. Not that we weren't pleased with the boat. Of course we haven't tried her in a big wind yet, but she sails like—like . . ."

"She sails like a swan, boy. Your sister and I went down to the pier and saw you go out. She's as fine as any sailing boat on the Sound."

Smiling his pleasure, Bill let his sister down, head first towards the piano bench so she could scoop Tumbles into her arms. Upside-down, grasping Tumbles, she caught sight of the Professor's housekeeper, and when Bill had swung her to the floor, she raced across the room, still clutching the kitten, and jumped up into Mrs. Marble's arms.

"Hey there, miss, you're knocking the wind out of me!" cried Mrs. Marble. Her face was red from the heat of her cooking, and her white apron flew up and wrinkled as Merrie clung to her.

"Dinner's served, sir," she announced. "I'd popped

Bill's into the oven to keep warm, but it's easily brought out again."

Bill stretched his arms in the warmth of the library, he felt laughter filling him as Merrie's laughter filled the old house when Mrs. Marble carried her to the kitchen to wash her hands. Picking up the Professor's cane and handing it to him, he walked at the old man's side across the library and the hallway into the dining room.

On the long, polished dining-room table, the candles in the candelabra were lit, as the Professor asked that they should be for every evening meal. The flames wavered when Bill passed them to help the old man into his chair at the head of the table, and again when he pushed Merrie's chair into place opposite the big mirror. Mrs. Marble carried in a tray of bowls of soup, placed it on the sideboard, and clasped her hands together. Bill slid into his place at the other side of the table, bowed his head, to listen to the Professor's grace.

"Dear Lord, Thy will be done. . . ." At that instant, Mrs. Marble gave a cry and rushed from the room. Bill sat paralysed, his hands hard knots at the sides of his chair.

"So it's true after all! Mother's gone! It's happened! What I thought out there on the water is true!" The words sprang at Bill and pounded and pounded in his brain. He could not have said how long it was before he raised his head and forced himself to push back his chair and move to the sideboard to serve the soup. Going back to his place, he picked up his spoon and ate, knowing that the Professor was glancing at him continually. He felt Merrie's solemn eyes upon him as she asked:

"What's the matter with Mrs. Marble? Why did she cry, Bill? Did she hurt herself? Is she coming back in a minute? Should I go and love her better?"

"Eat your soup, Merrie. She's all right. She'll come back. Eat your soup, that's a good girl." It was the Professor who spoke, who smiled at Merrie and began to talk

to her about having found Tumbles in the greenhouse that morning, about the new dahlia plants that had come, about his plans for a wall to protect his apple trees from winter winds. The old man addressed Mrs. Marble calmly when she came in with roast beef and peas and browned potatoes in their serving dishes, as if he were used to seeing her with quivering chin and eyes red from crying. And he turned again and again to Merrie, who gazed at him in delight, interrupting him to say:

"And did you know that our Tumbles has grown another inch? Bill measured her. Look, you can see how big she is. She's there, by the light in the drawing room. Isn't she lovely?"

When dinner was over, the Professor led Merrie to the kitchen door.

"Mrs. Marble," he called, "I think Merrie would like some of those ginger cookies you made this morning. Will you take care of it while I speak to Bill a moment?"

Merrie skipped into the kitchen and Professor made his way to the drawing room. Bill was fingering the magazines on the reading table and listening to the "thump, thump" of the Professor's cane coming steadily towards him. He closed his eyes as he felt the pressure of fingers on his shoulder, and heard the old man's voice, from, it seemed, a hundred miles away.

"The news came just an hour ago. I didn't want to say anything in front of the little girl, not so—so abruptly. We shall have to think how we can best tell her. It was the specialist who came. There was nothing more they could do. He gave me this note for you. He said your mother insisted on writing it herself." Bringing a small envelope from his breast pocket, the Professor turned Bill gently around.

Bill took the note. His fingers gripped till his nails dug into it, and then he dashed away without a word, out into the hall and up the broad, curving staircase to his room at

the front of the house. He rushed to the window where he had often come lately to gaze across the lane at the little white bungalow, so bright and cosy at night under the street lamp. But this time he did not look out. He stood with his head against the cold window pane, and something was telling him:

"Mother's gone. She can never come back." His head throbbed and a searing sensation came to his stomach so that he sank to his knees, with his face buried in his arms on the sill. But the hand which held the note began to ache. He opened the envelope, and stared blankly at the words.

*Dearest Bill:*

*I want you and Mennie to go to your Grandmother in England. I know that Professor will be willing to arrange your passage, and see that what you cannot take with you is sold. Please take care of Mennie, always. Please keep her safe. God bless my two children.*

*All my love, Mother*

Bill let the note fall to the floor, and his misery grew heavy and leaden, like a smothering substance turning everything black, making him unable to think or remember.

### *Chapter 3*

## THE LAST OF GINGER

**A**N hour went by as if it were a minute, and when Bill raised his head from the window sill, it was dark. Tumbles was padding towards him, purring and stroking herself against the furniture as she came. He picked her up and held her against his cheek. He hastily stuffed his mother's note into his pocket when Merrie raced to him.

"Mrs. Marble says it's time for me to go to bed," she said in her gay, musical way. "I told her I'd like you to put me to bed tonight. I've been to kiss the Professor good night, but I can't find—oh, there you are, Tumbles!"

Bill handed the kitten to his sister and turned on the reading lamp beside his bed. As he pulled the soft blue-brocade drapery across the window, careful again not to look out at the bungalow, Merrie gave a quick, hearty laugh, full and deep as a boy's.

"Hey, hey there, jumpy-bits!" The kitten squirmed and climbed to Merrie's shoulder and perched there, opening her mouth as if she were playing a game. Merrie's face was rosy and sparkling with fun. She did not yet know about Mother.

"You go and put your pyjamas on, Merrie," Bill said. "Hurry up now, and don't forget to wash your face and hands and brush your teeth."

When his sister had gone carrying the kitten with her, Bill took up the book on boats he had brought across from the bungalow. Sitting on the hassock under the reading lamp, he opened the book on his knees, and thumbed it

through, but all the time he looked over the top of it, remembering the words his mother had written. He would have to tell Merrie when she came back to him. The longer he and the Professor put off telling her, the harder it would be. It was like that day Mother had told him that his father would not be coming back from the Air Force. The news had come only a few weeks after they had rented the little house across the lane. Bill began to think about what he would say to his sister. He crouched over the hassock. The book slid to the floor, and his chin sank into his palms. He jumped as if he had been struck when Merrie touched him.

"I couldn't do all the back buttons," she said in a sleepy voice. Bill stared at her. How small she was, and how helpless, like the young rabbit he had found once at the edge of the woods! A wave of dread ran through him and he decided to wait till morning to tell her. But when he had finished with the buttons and she was beginning to walk away, yawning and stretching her arms, he pulled her back and said in a rush:

"Mother can't come back any more, Merrie, and you and I are going on a long trip. We're going to find Gram. You remember Mother's told us about Gram. We're going to find her and live with her, over in England, and I—I'll take care of you. I won't let anything happen to you." He buried his head in his sister's curls as he finished and held his arms around her. But she did not understand. She asked over his shoulder:

"Can Mommie come with us when we find Gram? And Tumbles, can Tumbles come?"

"Tumbles can come, but not Mother." Bill's misery made his voice blunt and hard.

"Why not Mommie, Bill? Why can't she come? I—I want Mommie to come!" Merrie began to cry.

Bill stood up with her in his arms, and carried her across the thick carpet of his room, out into the hall and into the





small square room next to the Professor's. When he had tucked her carefully into the little wooden bed in the shadow of the door, he pushed her hair back from her forehead, picked up Tumbles from the bedspread, and turned out the light.

"Don't feel bad, Merrie. Everything will be all right. You just go to sleep, and everything will be all right in the morning." He stepped back to kiss his sister and went out, leaving the door ajar. He stood in the dim light of the hallway, listening to the quiet, making sure Merrie was not crying. Then, holding Tumbles, he hurried downstairs, two steps at a time, past the drawing room and the library, where the Professor was playing the piano again, to the door leading through the butler's pantry into the kitchen. He slowed his steps, peering ahead till he saw that the kitchen was in darkness. Mrs. Marble had gone up to her room on the top floor. Then he crossed the kitchen and went out by the back door.

The tall black spruce trees behind Professor's house were like giants marching. With Tumbles in one arm, Bill moved to the edge of the back porch and stood gazing out beyond the trees, breathing the salt air from the Sound, keeping control of himself. As he turned, thinking to go back to the library to talk to the Professor, a quick whisper, "Wait a minute!" came to him from the bushes below the porch. He thrust the kitten into the kitchen and waited quietly. It was Jim who came forward, hesitating, and stumbling in his words.

"Bill, I—I know!" he said breathlessly. "I saw the doctor in town and asked him how your mother was, and he told me! And I wanted you to know that Mom and Dad and I have already talked it over and we want you and Merrie to come and live with us, that is, we'd planned to ask you if—if . . ." Jim's voice quavered and he finished hurriedly. "You will come, Bill, won't you? We really want you to. It'll be fine."

Bill did not mean to sound gruff when he answered, "No, Jim. We're going away. *Ginger's* yours now. I'm giving her to you."

"To me? What do you mean?"

"We're going far away. I can't take her with me, so I'm giving her to you." Bill was not looking at his friend now, but across the dip of the Professor's lawn.

"Wait a minute! You can't give your boat away, Bill! You did all the work. You found her, and you paid for everything. I couldn't take her! I wouldn't want her, not—not without . . ." Jim swallowed and lowered his eyes.

"You've got to take her. I'm leaving her to you. We might never come back."

"Might never come back? Why? Where are you going?"

"England."

There was a silence before Jim cried, "England? But that's terrible! You'd have to leave everything! Your mother wouldn't ask you to give up everything and go so far away, not when you're captain of the team this year and on the honour roll and —and with the boat and everything! You can stay with us, and if you don't want to live with us, you can stay here at Professor's. He'd be glad to have you. Any number of people in town would!"

"No, we've got to go." Bill threw an arm around a porch pillar. "Look, Jim, Mother wouldn't ask us to go if she didn't think it was the best thing. Gram's the only relative we have in the world, and Mother's asked us to go live with her. We can't do anything else."

Jim did not answer, but stayed quietly where he was, hunching his shoulders, dragging his toes over the flagstones of the path. Finally, without saying good night, he went away, across a corner of the lawn and out towards the lane. For a while Bill paced back and forth across the porch, as if to stamp out the ache inside him. Then he

walked round the house, across the lane, along the drive past the bungalow, and into the garage where *Ginger* had stood a few hours before. With quick movements, concentrating all his energy, he gathered the most valuable of his tools into his tool box, packing them carefully, wedging twisted newspaper into the crannies to hold everything in place. Next he put the paints away on the garage shelves, scraping the tops of the tins before he wedged down the lids. When he had tipped *Ginger's* foundations on end, he moved them over against the wall, swept the concrete floor and went out, locking the door behind him. Hardly thinking what he was doing, he ran along the driveway, to the left down the lane, and through the town. As he reached the pier and sat down at the end of it, the moon began to rise. First the stars grew pale, then a white light appeared over the horizon and a yellow ball sailed up out of the sea, growing smaller as it climbed.

Bill took off his trousers, his T-shirt and his plimsolls, and left them hidden under the pier. The sea was a deep emerald, dotted with leaping wavelets and sparkling with phosphorescence when he plunged in, striking out with broad strokes toward the buoy where *Ginger* lay. He pulled himself aboard and soon the sailboat bounded out into the breeze, her sails tiling as she headed for Scots' Island, to go right round this time without turning back. Behind Bill the shore was a fairy picture whose lights danced as *Merrie* danced; above him was *Ginger's* graceful canvas and her fine, delicately worked mast. And every part of sea and boat was flooded with moonlight.

Gliding through a tide that raced and wrinkled at each side of him, Bill seemed to be riding into the future. He looked up from the tiller and said aloud:

"I'll do everything you say, Mother. I'll go to England if you want me to, and I'll take care of *Merrie*. I'll never stop taking care of her, and I'll do my best, no matter what happens!"

## Chapter 4

### A PRESENT FROM JIM

THE fire was still burning in the library fireplace when Bill returned from his sail in *Ginger*. The room was quiet and dark except for the firelight, and the Professor, deep in his leather armchair, made no movement. Bill thought he was asleep, and it was only when he turned to tiptoe away that the old man gave a start and said:

"Ah, boy, it's you. I was expecting to have a talk. I didn't hear you come in."

"I wanted to show you Mother's note, sir," Bill said gravely. He stood before the Professor and took the envelope from his pocket. When he had handed it to the old man and turned on the lamp beside the leather chair, he waited, with one foot on the stool before the fire, and his arms resting on his thighs. He saw that there was no surprise in the old man's face as he read, but only a look of disappointment.

"So— she didn't change her mind after all," the Professor said, half to himself. Facing Bill, he explained, "Your mother and I discussed this matter when I visited her at the hospital a week ago. She said she wanted to talk about your future. I told her not to trouble herself, she would be well again soon. She seemed so—so full of life I couldn't believe it was . . ." The old man fumbled for his handkerchief, took off his glasses, and polished them absently as he went on. "She kept insisting she wanted to get everything arranged, and then she said she wanted you and the little girl to go to England. I told her I should be glad to have you stay on here. But your mother was so anxious to have

you join your grandmother. She kept saying that families ought to stay together, that going to England would be an opportunity for you. I—I was hoping she might have changed her mind. I was thinking . . .”

With his hands clasped behind him, Bill waited for the Professor to go on. There was no sound but the soft licking of the fire, and finally Bill said unhappily:

“I’m sure Mother thought a lot about what we should do, sir. She wouldn’t ask us to go over there unless she thought it would be best for everybody. I only wish Gram lived in America and not so far away, that’s all.”

The Professor turned his piercing gaze on Bill.

“You’re welcome to stay on here if you wish. You could go along in the old way, go back to school with your friends, do what you want to do. I’ve already had a word with Mrs. Marble and she’s willing. You have ability, boy. I’d pictured you at the University in a few years’ time, going into science or engineering.”

“I want to be a boatbuilder, sir. I want to manage my own yard and build sailboats, bigger ones than *Ginger*, real racing yachts.” Bill forgot his sorrow for a moment, but presently the hurt look came to his eyes again.

“Your mother would understand, you know,” said Professor, “if you chose to stay.”

“I’ve decided we should do what Mother wants us to, sir. Thank you for being willing to have us, though. I hope—I hope some day we’ll find it was the right thing to do—going over to England, I mean.”

The old man nodded. “All right, boy.”

Bill took back his mother’s note, said good night to the Professor, and climbed to his own room. He undressed, opened the curtains so that the moonlight streamed in, and went to bed. He lay tossing for hours, his mind racing with thoughts of the future. When he finally fell asleep, he dreamed the dream that was to torment him often during the nights before he and Merrie left for England. In his

dream he was fighting his way through a swamp, crawling and falling, searching for his mother. The mud thrust sticky fingers at him and sucked him under. He could see his mother ahead, but he was sinking and could not reach her. He tried to lift his arms, to scream for help, but terror stopped his throat and grew in him till his eyes flew open in the darkness.

The days passed quickly, so filled with activity that Bill felt bewildered, as though there were a veil between him and all that was happening, as though he must make an effort to understand how his life was changing. First there were the dozens of people who came to say they were sorry and to ask if there was anything they could do to help. The family doctor called, and the nurses who had tended his mother in the hospital. The boys and girls, who had been his friends ever since he could remember, came, and his science teacher, whom he had always especially liked. Even old Mr. Saunders, from the boatbuilding yard, appeared in the same faded hat and shabby trousers he had worn when he had come to give Bill advice about the rebuilding of *Ginger*.

Then there were the errands into town with notes from the Professor to his bank, or to the church where the funeral was to be held, or to the auctioneers who were arranging the sale of the Waltons' furniture. Bill had measured six feet one at his last, his fifteenth birthday, and both his height and his shining red-brown hair made people notice him as he passed. The days after his mother's death, people said that he seemed to be everywhere at once. They would stop him, they would gather round him till he stood in a surging current of sympathy and helpfulness. "Thank you," he would mumble, "thank you," and hurry away, with his usual long energetic stride, his chin down and all his old cheerfulness gone.

Sometimes he passed the school athletic field, where the boys of his football team were practising for the season to

begin in two more weeks. The boys would stop playing when they caught sight of him, and wave at him, smiling, trying to cover up their embarrassment. The coach would be there, too, waving like the others, and play would not start again till Bill had turned the corner and was out of sight.

When the day of the funeral came, Bill walked calmly into the church, with Merrie, wide-eyed with wonder at the flowers and the music and the many people gathered, silently watching. Bill held his sister's hand and glanced at her continually to make sure she was not afraid. He lifted her gently to her place beside him in the front pew. After the service, when the procession began to move slowly out of the church towards the little graveyard across the street, Bill held his arm round his sister's shoulders and sometimes bent to whisper to her. He seemed unaware of the congregation filing after him from the church, he seemed not to realize that all the boys of his team were there, a short distance behind him. At the graveside Merrie began to cry, and Bill picked her up and held her head against his chest. He waited quietly till the ceremony was over.

In spite of the preparations, clearing out, packing, and labelling the bags, in spite of the arrival of an envelope with tickets for a passenger liner that was to leave New York in three days' time, Bill could not believe that he and Merrie were going away. Even when he thought about it, it seemed a vague, future thing. It was unreal right up to the hour when he and Merrie were to start off to board the liner. The Professor was taking them to New York in his long black car driven by Wallace, the chauffeur. Bill helped his sister into the fine coat and hat the Professor had bought for her because they matched the blue of her eyes. He put on his own new grey overcoat, and his bright plaid scarf, and stuffed his new leather gloves into his pockets. Then he gazed around the Professor's drawing room, blinking as if he were only half awake.

It had been arranged for Tumbles to go to England, too, travelling in the part of the ship reserved for animals. Mrs. Marble came down from the attic of the Professor's house, busily dusting an old wickerwork basket.

"This," she declared, "is a genuine cat basket. It's been up there for years, and you're to have it. Pop the kitten inside and fasten the lid. It's the only safe way to travel with a cat."

But before putting Tumbles into the basket, Merrie took her out for a last run along the Professor's drive. Bill circled round the little girl and the kitten where they were playing, crossed the lane, and unlocked the blue door of the bungalow. The rooms were bare now, except for the luggage stacked inside the living room. Day after day the women from their church had come to help empty drawers and closets, and scrub and polish till the little house shone in readiness for the new tenants who would be arriving in a few days. It was kind of them, but the empty, spotless rooms made Bill ache with loneliness as he thought of how it used to be.

Quickly he began to carry the suitcases and his toolbox along the path to the lane. When the luggage was piled up where he and Wallace could lift it easily into the boot and on to the luggage rack of the Professor's car, Bill went back to lock the blue door. Bending low under the rose arbour, he noticed that the porch was buried in roses, as if it were still midsummer. He lifted his head when he walked along the path, and sniffed the damp salty air. Long Island Sound gave everything in Bill's town the feel of the sea. Each time the town baked dry in the sun and grew more like other places in New England, the Sound would send a quick storm or a salt shower; or there would be a foghorn sounding, or the whistles and bells of ships passing, or the drone of planes as they skimmed the water around the Point. The sun awoke from the Sound, and when the moon rose it looked cool and wet, as if newly sprung from the waves.



While Bill was crossing the porch with his key ready, a crowd of boys stole up behind him, and one of them clamped a hand over his eyes. The others began to shout, grabbing his arms, stretching them forward, filling them with the good-bye presents they had brought, clapping him on the back and pulling his hair.

"So long, kid!" and "Be seeing you!" and "Good luck, Cap!" they called as they raced away. Only Jim stayed behind. He held out a large flat package. Bill knew when he saw it that it contained the beautifully illustrated book on sailing ships which he and Jim had been admiring in the bookshop window. Putting down his other gifts, Bill drew the book from its wrappings.

"Thanks, Jim. You shouldn't have . . ." Bill did not say more. He looked into Jim's face as he shook hands, and then turned away.

"Well—so long . . ." the two boys said very slowly, almost in unison. Jim walked through the harbour and to the left down the lane, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his eyes on the ground, never looking back. Bill stood on the porch steps, watching, and when Jim's footsteps had faded away, he moistened his lips and tried to swallow the hard lump in his throat.

## *Chapter 5*

### THE VOYAGE

THEY climbed into the back seat of the Professor's car and waved good-bye first to Mrs. Marble, then to the people who crowded at the edges of the pavements as Wallace drove through the town. Merrie let Tumblers out of the cat basket; and Bill opened the gifts the boys had brought. There were fishhooks, sinkers and floats, a fishing line, a small compass, a pennant with the school emblem on it—all had something to do with sailing or fishing. Bill pushed them here and there in his pockets. But Jim's book he carried on his knees, as carefully as if it were made of glass.

Soon Bill and the Professor stood facing one another for the last time, with Merrie between them, holding Tumblers in her arms. On all sides people were saying good-bye, and passengers were hurrying towards the two gangways which rose steeply to the ship's main deck. The talking and laughter were only a buzz in the huge dock building with its platform extending out into the river. Yet even the dock was dwarfed by the great shining passenger liner waiting at the side of it. Its decks swept up and out like tiers of a gigantic fairy castle. Already smoke rose from its two big funnels high overhead, and little cascades of water poured from its sides. Here and there heads bobbed out of the portholes which were ranged like rows of eyes far down along the ship's hull.

Bill put out his hand. "Thanks a million, sir," he said.

"For what?" The Professor smiled.

"For everything, for all you've done, for helping us so much."

"It's nothing. I want to wish you luck, boy. Don't forget your mother. Don't ever forget what a fine woman she was. And now"—the seriousness went out of the Professor's voice—"now I have something for you." The old man handed Bill a shiny new wallet with a roll of notes inside. "It's a hundred dollars. It may come in handy. Some is in tens and some in ones. You'll need some on the way, and you may use the rest as you wish. Just put it in your pocket and go along. No, don't bother to thank me. Hurry along now."

An air of expectancy was spreading across the dock and along the decks of the ship. Most of the baggage had been carried aboard by the porters and dock hands. People were clustering and swarming; little groups were parading up and down, with children running round and round them. A bell sounded, and there was a low piercing blast from the ship's whistle. Those who were leaving gathered at the ship's railings, shouting to those staying behind. There was a lot of smiling and talking; but close to Bill, a woman was crying as she said good-bye to her children.

Bill slipped his new wallet into his inside overcoat pocket and edged Merrie towards the end of the gangway. All at once he turned and said hurriedly to the Professor:

"I guess you know I don't want to go. It's terrible going so far away. Everything was just right, the boat and the fellows and the team and the school and . . . Well, what bothers me is thinking it might be forever. I could stand it if I knew we could come back home again someday. . . ."

"It was your decision, boy," said the Professor, "and you must keep your courage up and stand by it. It's courage that will see you through."

"I know, sir."

"And now that I've thought some more about it, I never knew your mother to make a mistake in her judgment, not about things that matter."

"No, sir."

The Professor took a step towards Bill.

"It won't be easy, boy, but look here"—the old man put his hand on Bill's arm—"you go over there and make a success of it. Everything depends on that. It might not be forever, not if you do very well in your studies . . ."

A look of boundless joy swept over Bill's face.

"You mean—you mean you might make it possible for us to come home again after . . ." But the Professor only said:

"I want you to write now and then. Will you do that, Bill?"

Bill felt suddenly stronger and taller. It was the first time the Professor had called him anything but "boy".

"Yes, I'll write. I'll write often. There won't be anybody like you over there, sir." He moved away, helping Merrie up the gangway, turning to watch the Professor walk slowly across the grey expanse of the pier. Others besides Bill watched the handsome old man who stopped to wave before he entered the lift that would carry him down to the street.

Holding Merrie before him Bill placed one foot firmly after the other up the gangway. It was as he stepped on to the deck that Tumbles suddenly clawed at Merrie's coat and leaped with a bound over her shoulder. Shrieking, Merrie pulled loose from Bill's grasp and squeezed her way back, crawling between people's legs and tumbling over bags and boxes. Bill was behind her, pushing against the stream of passengers coming aboard.

Merrie was stopped by a man in uniform at the lower end of the gangway.

"Hey, there, girlie, back you go! Passengers aren't allowed off the ship once they've boarded her. Go on back now, there's a good girl." But Merrie wailed:

"I want my kitten! She ran away! I want her!" And when the man would not let her go, she cried at the top of her lungs, "Tumbles, Tumbles! Oh, please come back!"

She struggled to free herself, but the man held her arm tightly as he called to another official:

"Have you seen a cat around, Ted? This kid's lost her cat." The man named Ted came closer, stroking his chin.

"Seen at least a dozen French poodles, but no cat. Which way did it go?"

"Don't know. Must have come back down the gangway. It was going aboard all right. I saw it. And if it's to sail with Miss Muffet here, there's no time to lose. Have a look around, Ted, will you?"

Bill reached the bottom of the gangway only to be stopped by a third official.

"You sailing this trip, sonny? You'd better get back on board or she'll be leaving without you." Bill tried to explain about the kitten.

"Yes, yes, I know," said the official impatiently. "I heard your sister shouting about it. But we haven't time. We can't hold up the ship for a cat. Come on now, take the little girl back on board with you. We're going to lower the gangway."

There was a whistle, and a group of men rushed towards the gangway. Quickly Bill lifted Merrie to his shoulder and carried her, kicking and sobbing, back on to the ship. He set her down and held her with her face against him as he gazed over at the dock. The gangway was swept back into the shadows of the pier. The cables holding the liner fast were drawn up by the crew, and Bill felt a soft rocking motion as she moved out towards the centre of the river. He spoke gently to his sister, with his mouth against her ear.

"Don't worry, Merrie, we'll find Funnies. She must be on board. She has her label on. Somebody will catch her and bring her to our cabin." But Merrie pulled Bill towards the railing, sobbing as he tried to hold her back. "I saw her! She's not on the ship! She's gone!" Bill could not

make his sister leave the railing. He crouched at her side, pressing his forehead against the cold metal of the liner's hull.

"If Tumbles went back, somebody will find her and send her to Professor, Merrie, and if she's on board, we'll find her. She's not gone." He drew his handkerchief from his breast pocket to wipe Merrie's eyes, but she would not lift her head, and Bill could only wait helplessly, begging her to stop crying. People near by who had been waving and shouting grew quiet and watched over their shoulders.

The liner turned her prow down river, and the pier building she had left shrank till it was only a tier of blocks, lost among hundreds of other tiers on the riverbank. Merrie laid her head limply on Bill's chest, and he picked her up and carried her downstairs to their cabin at the end of C Deck. There he helped her to get undressed and into her pyjamas, found her toothbrush, stood over her while she brushed her teeth, and tucked her into the lower bunk. Then he sat by her side. She did not speak of Tumbles anymore, and when her sobs died away, Bill thought she would go to sleep. But she began to complain about feeling cold. Bill pulled the covers from his bunk. As he tucked them around her shoulders, his hand brushed her forehead. It was burning hot, and yet she had begun to shiver so much that her teeth were chattering. Bill grew afraid. Bending over her, he whispered:

"You just stay quiet for a minute, Merrie. I'm going out to—to get something." He tiptoed out of the cabin. The bright lights of the corridor blinded him, and the ship tipped and swayed as he made his way to the main saloon and stopped a fat man in a white jacket.

"Please, sir, my sister is ill. She has a fever. Is there a doctor on board?"

"Aye, there is that. What's your room number?" The man had a jovial, easy manner and a strong Scotch accent.

"C 23."

"Good. I'll nip along to the Infirmary and fetch him. You just toddle back to the cabin and wait, laddie."

Bill went back to the cabin and sat in the canvas chair by Merrie's bunk, leaning forward till his chin rested on the board fastened to the bunkside to keep passengers from rolling out of bed in heavy seas. He gazed forlornly at his sister, wishing she would open her eyes. Everything would be all right, he knew, if Tumble could come bounding into the cabin, or if only Mother were with them . . . His head sank down between his arms, and he did not hear the ship's doctor enter.

"How long has she been like this?" The rumble of the doctor's voice jerked Bill to his feet. Before he could answer, there were other questions in quick succession:

"Was she ill when you came aboard? Has she been in contact with any contagious disease lately? What children's diseases has she had?" And all the while, with quick, efficient fingers, the doctor was feeling Merrie's pulse, and placing a thermometer under her tongue.

"I shall take her back with me to the Infirmary. We can't have an epidemic spreading around the ship." The words sounded cool and impersonal, and yet the doctor had a pleasant face, large and ruddy with deep creases in his cheeks. He took the thermometer from Merrie's mouth and read aloud:

"One hundred and two. Yes, she'll definitely have to go to the Infirmary. We'll know the worst inside twenty-four hours. In the meantime you'll oblige everyone aboard if you will stay here in your cabin, young fellow. I'll arrange for your meals to be brought to you, and I'll notify you when it's all right for you to go out and mix with the other passengers."

Pulling the covers loose from the bunk, the doctor wrapped them around Merrie as he picked her up. With a nod to Bill, he pushed open the cabin door and stepped

over the sill. Bill sprang out into the corridor as if to snatch his sister back.

"Please, sir, let me carry her. I—I'm responsible . . ."

"No, I'm sorry lad. You've been in contact enough as it is. Go back now and wait in your cabin till you hear from me." The doctor carried Merrie down the corridor and around the corner, and in her fright, the little girl cried so loudly that Bill could hear her for a long time after she was out of sight. Or was he hearing the crying in his head, only imagining that she was calling him?

Stepping back into the cabin, Bill went to the porthole. Its round glass window was closed, but its metal guard was loose. When he found he could not see out on tiptoe, he dragged a chair across the cabin and climbed up, opening the window and leaning out. The tugs which had nosed the ship into the main stream of the river were gone, the river banks were out of sight, and there was open sea as far as he could see. He turned to look down at the tousled sheets of his sister's bunk, at her clothes he had folded on top of a suitcase.

Then he laid his cheek against the rim of the porthole. The sensation came over him that had come at the news of his mother's death. But his misery was greater now. All the despair he had been hiding deep inside during the last days came rushing out, and his loneliness was colder and emptier than anything he had ever known. It was the loneliness of fearing he had nothing waiting for him, nothing to make him glad again. He came down from the porthole and sat in the chair, his head in his hands.



## Chapter 6

### THE TELEGRAM

THE hours after Merrie was carried away were heavy, solid things which Bill could not move aside. He sat in his cabin, listening for the doctor's footsteps along the corridor; but he heard only the throbbing of engines, the whirring of the cabin fan, and the gentle creaking of the ship as she rolled. He opened Jim's book, glanced at a few pages, and put it down. He began to move about the cabin, unpacking his clothes and Merrie's, and placing them in the closet next to the bunks, and in the drawers of the bureau by the washstand.

The steward came with his evening meal on a tray. There was roast turkey, ice cream and a variety of fruits; but the warm, close air of the cabin had taken away Bill's appetite. He forced himself to eat most of the food, then prepared for bed and climbed to his bunk, where he lay awake till past midnight, tossing from side to side as the sea roughened and the ship began to pitch.

He awoke the next morning with his mother's last message in his mind: "Please take care of Merrie, always." Dressing hurriedly, he waited till his breakfast had been brought, and without touching it, opened the door and slipped out into the corridor. When he came to the wide stairway leading to the upper decks, he slowed down and swept his hand along the rail. He climbed several stairways, stopping at the top of each to read the signs over doors and corridors. After half an hour, he found at the end of a passage the word Infirmary. He unlatched a low gate, walked past two closed doors to a third marked

Surgery, knocked, and when a voice said, "Come in," he opened the door and found himself facing the doctor who had taken Merrie away. Seated behind a desk, with his lamp shining over him, he seemed even bigger than he had the afternoon before, and there was a stern set to his mouth when he looked up and recognized Bill.

"Say there, young fellow, I thought I told you to stay in your cabin," he said. "You're endangering the health of the ship coming out like this. If you won't do as you're told, I shall have to confine you here."

"I'm sorry, sir. I was worrying about my sister."

"Your sister is sleeping at the moment. We'll notify you when we've made our diagnosis." The doctor turned his attention back to his papers, but Bill stood where he was.

"Could I see her, please, just to know she's all right?"

"We've given her a sedative. She's not to be disturbed just yet," the doctor answered, tapping impatiently with his pencil. "We'll let you know when you may see her. Go along back now."

"Well, thank you." Bill left the Infirmary, thumping out his disappointment with his heels against the corridor floor. He returned to his cabin, but when he reached in to turn on the light, his misery made him close the door and turn back. He hurried past the Smoking Room and the Cinema, and found the stairway to the Sports Deck.

As he climbed the steps, he thought, I could tell him what's wrong with Merrie if he'd give me a chance. Sticking her alone like that won't help. She'll cry every minute of the time she's awake. I wish I'd never called that doctor!

The shuffleboard and deck-tennis equipment had not yet been brought out, and only a few passengers were sitting in the deck chairs in the shelter of the Sports Deck entrance. Bill walked past them out into the wind of the deck, and laced his fingers through the wiring that stretched up over his head. He looked down at the froth of

the ship's wake, at the gulls dipping low for the last time before turning back towards the safety of the land.

It grew quiet, and the soft swishing of the water as the ship cut through it lulled him into a dream about sailing with Jim in *Ginger*. He felt the lifting and falling of *Ginger's* stern, the rolling as she cut through the waves, the spray on his face, the cool wind in his hair. For a moment he forgot that Merrie was in the Infirmary, and that he and she were being rushed farther and farther from home. He smiled in pleasure, and the voice which suddenly boomed in his ears made him jerk to attention and jump back from the wiring.

"Will Mr. Bill Walton please report immediately to the Infirmary." Bill whirled around, his back against the wiring, as the words were repeated. There was no one near him, and seconds went by before he realized that the voice had come over the ship's loud-speaker system. He bolted down the stairway to the Main Deck, two steps at a time. Before he reached the gateway to the Infirmary, Merrie's cries told him where she was. But as he opened her door, the doctor stopped him. Bill stiffened, and the doctor said curtly:

"I'm having a room made ready for you here. Your sister is no better. I've never seen such a restless, unhappy child. Is she often like this?"

"No, sir." Anger welled up in Bill. He closed his mouth in a tight line, and made up his mind about what he would say. He would tell the doctor about Mother's death, about their having to come away, and their losing the kitten. But before he could begin, the doctor walked away with a shrug.

"Well, see what you can do to calm her, and then go and get your things," he called back.

Bill ran to the bed where Merrie lay propped against her pillows. He hugged her tightly.

"Don't cry, Merrie," he said. "I'm here. I'll stay with you." Merrie tried to speak above her sobs.

"Tumbles—got—drownded. Oh, Bill, she got drownded!"

"No, she didn't, Merrie. She ran back down the gangway. You just had a bad dream. Everything's all right."

"Will somebody find her and take her h-home and I-love her?" Merrie turned her eyes, swimming with tears, on her brother's face.

"Sure, Merrie." Bill managed to smile. "And they won't pull her tail as you did, and they'll give her a whole tin of cat food every day."

"Will they?" Merrie was not wailing any more. She sighed again and again, and squeezed her covers in her hands. "Tumbles," she whispered. "I wish I could see her. And I want to see Mommie. Why doesn't Mommie come?"

"I'll tell you what," said Bill. "I'll go get my new book. It's a beauty. You didn't see it very well in Professor's car. It has a boat in it almost like *Ginger*." He went to Merrie's door and peered out. The doctor was not in sight, and he raced out of the Infirmary, down to the cabin and back again with Jini's gift. He sat by Merrie's bed making up stories about sailing, till the little girl relaxed her hold on his jacket, till her eyes closed and her head sank back against her pillows. Then he tiptoed away, leaving his book on the table where she could reach it when she awakened. In the hall outside the door, a nurse came to him.

"Go and get your pyjamas and toothbrush and slippers now," she said. "I'm afraid the doctor meant what he said about keeping you here."

"Oh, that's O.K.," and Bill smiled. "I don't mind now I've seen my sister. I'd rather be where I can keep an eye on her. She'll be better from now on. She's not a cry-baby usually. She's just had a tough time lately, that's all."

Bill brought his things to the plain white room next to Merrie's, and he and Merrie did not go through the Infirmary doorway again till the day the voyage ended. Bill

spent most of the next four days of the crossing with his sister, and the nurse brought toys for her, and books about boats and sailing from the ship's library, for him. Then, a few hours before the liner reached Southampton, the nurse brought a telegram in a yellow envelope. He tore it open and read

WILL BE THERE TO MEET YOU. EVERYTHING CHAMPION.  
LOVE. GRAM

Bill repeated it aloud to Merric, grinning. He tried to picture the old woman his mother had told him about, a tiny old woman with big ears, who wore her clothes inside-out sometime, for luck, and gave her canaries bath in the palm of her hand.

"Maybe it won't be so bad in England," he told himself. "Maybe it'll be just exactly what I make of it, and boy, I'm going to have a good try at making a success of it while I'm about it!"

## *Chapter 7*

### JOURNEY'S END

THE ship had passed the Isle of Wight and was turning slowly into Southampton Water when Bill and Merrie hurried out of the Infirmary and up to the railing of the Promenade Deck. Gulls crossed and recrossed before them, as if making a path of welcome, and soon the doll-like figures on the pier ahead grew till they were life-sized. Gram would be shorter than most of the people waiting there, Bill told himself, and probably dressed in the old-fashioned black clothes his mother had described to him.

"Tell me if you see a little old lady anywhere," he said eagerly to his sister. "She might be at the back of the crowd. She's so little we might not be able to see her if she couldn't get out in front."

Now the ship was turning, slowly, with the water frothing about her and the smoke from the two pushing tugs drifting over her in dirty puffs. Now her engines stopped completely; she was only a few yards from the dock. The cables were run out with a clanking and a hissing. They fell spiralling on to the pier, where men seized them and pulled together to secure them to the capstans. There was a soft bump as the liner brushed against the dockside. The dock hands ran with a gangway—it looked as if they were going to jab it into the hull of the ship. Once more Bill searched the crowd, so close now that he could hear every word shouted back and forth, all the shouts of joy, all the happy greetings and laughter and questions about the voyage. With his disappointment shadowing his face, he

backed away from the railing, drawing Merrie with him. But his voice was bright as he said:

"We'll get in line and have our passports checked. Gram's sure to be there by the time we go ashore."

Half an hour later, Bill and Merrie moved down the gangway and on to Southampton Dock. Passengers, porters and officials jostled them this way and that as they threaded their way along, gazing hopefully at one elderly woman, then another, only to turn away and search again.

A low counter ran almost the whole length of the dock, and behind it, customs men were examining suitcases, boxes and trunks, and marking them with chalk as they let them pass. Merrie followed Bill to the space under the large letter W, hanging from the ceiling. She watched as he began to drag their belongings together into one spot. To his dismay, Bill saw that his toolbox had burst open at one end; his saw and brace and screwdrivers, his packets of nails were spilling out on to the floor. He reached inside, drew out his hammer, and tried to fasten the box together again; but the end panel was badly smashed. He ran to the counter and interrupted a customs man.

"Please, could you tell me where I can find a rope? My toolbox . . ."

"Speak to one of the porters," the man said quickly, without looking up from the trunk he was examining.

Bill raced to a sallow-faced man pushing a trolley piled high with luggage. He ran alongside, shouting in the man's ear, "Could you help me find some rope? I want to tie up my toolbox."

"Hold on a minute, ducks, I'll be right with you." The man pushed his load past the counter, into the wide space where passengers who had not had their baggage checked were not allowed to go. Bill waited anxiously by his box, searching the pier again and again for Gram. It struck him that everyone had begun to hurry, and that the dusty little

train at the other side of the counter was puffing as if ready to leave.

"Is that the only train, please?" he asked a man running by.

"That's right, lad. That's the boat train," the man shouted back. "Won't be another like it till the next ship puts to sea." Bill saw that the train was filling with passengers, that the huge area before the customs counter was nearly empty. In desperation he picked up the toolbox and lifted it, broken as it was, on to the counter. Going back for the suitcases, he looked over his shoulder and saw the sallow-faced porter walking towards him, flourishing a length of rope.

"Have to get a move on here, ducks," he said jauntily, jerking a thumb in the direction of the train. "She'll be pullin' out in two minutes, and she don't wait for no man."

"But - but . . ." How could Bill explain about Gram's not being there, about having no train ticket, and no idea where to go? He felt in his pocket for his small leather book with Gram's address inside, and for the wallet the Professor had given him. Then he began to tie the rope the porter had brought, securing the broken end of the toolbox, while the porter wheeled the last of the suitcases to the counter.

Presently Bill found himself stationed before three customs officials. They questioned him in rapid succession:

"Coming to live permanently in Britain?"

"Have you anything to declare?"

"Have you brought anything of value? Any gifts?"

At that moment there was a loud call from the train.

"All aboard!" One of the customs men raised his hand, and in a furious burst of energy Bill and the porter piled the baggage on to the trolley, rushed it to the baggage coach, with Merrie running after them, and unloaded it. Bill drew a dollar bill from his wallet and thrust it into



the porter's hands. Then, with Merrie in his arms, he raced to the single door still open, jumped aboard, and the train pulled away towards London. Grasping the strap by his side, Bill drew the window closed so the smoke from the engine could not come in.

Three hours later, Bill and Merrie sat on a narrow seat in a coach full of people, on a second, larger train going north to Yorkshire. They were tired from their run across a London station, but Bill felt older than he had ever felt before. He had had some of the Professor's dollars changed into English money; he had bought tickets to Bridlington, the nearest town to Gram's village of Flamborough; he had had the baggage carried to the Yorkshire train, and had sent Gram a telegram to tell her they were on their way. He leaned back against the hard plush seat and began to doze. But in a moment his eyes flew open in surprise. Merrie was crying.

"I want to get off! I want my Mommie! Oh, please, Bill, take me back, take me back!" Bill shook Merrie's arms and whispered at her:

"Be quiet, can't you? Be quiet!" He felt the stares of the people in the coach, he saw the frown of the woman across from him, and heard someone say under his breath, "She's only a baby. You shouldn't treat her like that."

Numb with embarrassment, Bill put his arm around his sister and held her against him till she stopped crying and fell asleep. Then he moved her carefully so that her head rested on his lap, and wiped the tearstains from her cheeks with his handkerchief. He did not betray his loneliness or his weariness, but sat grimly looking out of the coach window as the flat green fields of the south turned to the grey flinty hills of the north, and as the sunshine of the early afternoon turned to dismal rain.

At York, Bill and Merrie changed trains, and as Merrie curled up at his side and fell asleep again, Bill sat stiffly erect, cold and hungry and downhearted, every minute

seeming to stretch to an hour. Finally the guard thrust his head inside the coach and caught Bill's attention.

"Next stop Bridlington, lad. You'd best wake up t'little lass there."

In the Bridlington Railway Station a few minutes later, a stocky, sun-burned man in dark-blue trousers and sweater showed Bill where to check the toolbox and all the cases except the small one holding the things he and Merrie would need immediately, and the cat basket, which Merrie clutched as if 'Tumbles were still inside. Then the man picked up Merrie and walked at Bill's side through the driving rain to the Flamborough bus stop. Bill said "Thank you," shook hands, and, after the man had gone, stood holding out the flap of his coat to protect his sister from the wet.

When the bus came, he lifted Merrie in, and held out to the conductor some of the large, unfamiliar English coins he had received in London.

"Flamborough, please," he said in a hoarse, tired voice. The conductor chose four coins, handed Bill two tickets, and smiled in a friendly way as Bill and Merrie settled themselves on the front seat. Merrie's head dropped wearily on to Bill's shoulder, her arms sank slowly down, and Bill could feel her gentle breathing on his neck. He closed his eyes and lost track of time as the bus drove on and on, sometimes winding, sometimes going quickly straight forward. His head throbbed, his throat was dry, and his hunger was a nagging ache in his stomach. He could not have said whether it was early or late evening when the conductor called out, "Flamborough Village!" and he looked around to find that he and Merrie were the only passengers still on the bus. Hurriedly he brought the case and the cat basket from the rack overhead, woke Merrie, and lifted her down to the street. The conductor had raised his hand to the bell to signal to the driver to go on when Bill called out:

"Can you tell us the way to Danes Dyke, please?"

"Eh, lad, so I was right after all!" The conductor lowered his hand and came down to Bill in the road. "Do you know, I was telling myself all along you were Liza Wade's grandson. I thought once over about asking you if you were t'one, like, when we got near Danes Dyke stop. You've come too far, you see. It's a good ten minutes' walk back. If you'd like to stav on t'bus, we'll drop you off at t'right place on our way back in half an hour."

"Half an hour . . ." Bill hesitated before he said, "Thanks, but I think we'd better get there as fast as we can."

"Happen you're right," the conductor nodded. "Eh, she's a right grand old lady, your grandmother, lad. There's only good said about her in these parts." Bill tried to smile at the merry face leaning towards him.

"Thanks," he managed to say. The conductor went on:

"But I'd best be telling you how to go. You walk straight along t'road there, turn right past t'square, go uphill a bit, and take t'first turning down to t'sea. Follow that lane as far as it goes and you'll see t'house, a big grey one, down in t'hollow. You can't miss it, lad. 'Bye, and she'll be that glad to see you!"

The conductor climbed aboard, waving as the bus pulled away. Bill and Merrie found themselves in a narrow street where cottages and shops crowded close to the kerbs in uneven terraces. They heard the clink of boot-studs on flint and pebble pathways, and the drawn-out notes of a bass voice in a cottage near by. They could not hear the sea, but they could smell it. The wind rushed in, full of its damp, salty tang, and from a courtyard across the road, where market crates were piled high against the walls, there came flurries of dust and a keen smell of fish. It was cold and dark. It had stopped raining, and there was a moon, but soon it scudded behind the clouds and there was only an occasional street lamp to light the way

when Bill and Merrie set out in the direction the conductor had pointed. The lamps cast their shadows on the cottage walls as they walked. One shadow was a giant with a huge square head; but the other was tiny and thin, an elf at the giant's side.

Holding his arm firmly around Merrie's shoulders, Bill urged her on past the village square, telling her about the things they might have to eat when they reached Gram's. But by the time he had turned down the shore lane, Merrie was whimpering and stumbling at his side in the wind and cold, forcing him to go slower and slower. Indignation seized him. Why, if Gram was as good as the conductor said, hadn't she come to meet them? Why had she made them take this long, terrible trip by themselves, and after she had promised in her telegram to come?

Finally Bill hid the case he was carrying behind a tree, and caught up his sister, together with the cat basket which she would not leave behind. The sound of the sea was clear and loud now. The lane went ahead like an arrow driving against the wind, driving without end, and it seemed to Bill that he had been walking as long as he could remember when he stopped and looked down to his right at the shadowy forms of two great chimneys. He tried to reach them. He was sure they belonged to Gram's house; but the only path before him turned aside, down a rough stairway to a narrow rustic bridge, so hidden under tall trees that no piece of sky showed through. He carried Merrie across the bridge, and followed a twisting path through ferns and brambles, steeply up again out of the valley. He thought he had lost his way. He was sure he was going in the wrong direction. And all the while he was blaming Gram for it, but whistling and singing so Merrie should not be afraid.

It had been very still in the valley, but as he climbed, he felt the wind on his cheek, stronger with every step he took. Then the path turned, and suddenly the wind met

him full in the face, pressing against him, shrieking as if to force him back. The moon came out from behind the clouds, and he entered a world he had never dreamed of, a world of white cliffs a hundred feet high, with the sea pounding and frothing at their base; and below him, deep down, there was a tiny bay, and a ravine before which there stood a grey stone house.

Gripping Merrie tightly, Bill climbed step by step down the cliffside, down a long steep stairway of ledges hacked into the mud and rock, till he reached a broad cement terrace edged by a sea wall. Dashing at the wall was the surf, and from it a creek cut inland past the terrace and the house. The tide was turning and the creek was a mass of whirlpools. What a weird place to live, Bill thought, how strange and exciting to live in a house so sheltered from the winds by the cliffs and yet so near the sea, separated from it by only a terrace and a sea wall!

The spray from the waves filled Bill with new energy. Lifting Merrie higher in his arms, he turned towards the house, twenty feet away, behind the terrace. He walked toward a long low window of diamond panes, where an oil lamp was burning. Next to the window was a small porch entrance, so overhung by tangles of ivy that Bill had to strain his eyes to read the name, *Dyke House*, over the door. As he stood uncertainly, reaching out to knock, he heard organ music. Was it a radio, or was a real organ being played inside? The sound of it thrilled him strangely—it was like arriving at the Professor's house. He reached farther into the shadows of the porch. His knuckles brushed against the door and it opened softly, the moment he touched it.

Then suddenly the ceremony of the house vanished, as if the sun had come out. Bill carried Merrie into a room so lovely they both caught their breaths. It was a long room, filled with orange light and bright with flowers. On a low settee under the window was a row of bird cages,

each with a cover like a colourful tea cosy, and at the far end of the room, in a recess in the wall, was a huge fireplace. Wondering at the room, Bill did not at first notice the old woman in the high-backed chair before the tiny ship's organ, perhaps because she sat at one side where the light of the fire did not touch her. But then she stood up, crying out in surprise. She was dressed in a long black dress, a gingham apron, and a thick grey shawl. She peered out from under a white ruffled cap, and as she crossed the room, she held both hands out before her. In a moment she was embracing Bill and kissing Merrie, and laughing and crying all at once, with her eyes crinkled out of sight and her cap slipping back over her white hair.

"Ah, and I thought you were angels come down from the Lord Himself in His Heaven, I did! And you've come all alone! God bless you, you've come all alone! I cannot think what happened. I was all set and dusted to come and fetch you tomorrow! Oh, I'm that glad you're here, and safe and well! Come along, loves, you're just in time for a nice cup of cocoa, and cakes and crumpets and biscuits and -and- well, anything your hearts desire! I -I'm that glad . . .

"Come, loves, sit by the fire and warm yourselves, both of you. Ah, you're both cold as stone. Here, let me pull the chairs closer and poke up the old fire a bit. Bless you, I could sing for joy! A whole day early, too! I was going to set out as soon as the sun was up tomorrow. See, Bill, lad, I was just reading the letter from the shipping company. It's strange. It does say Thursday, the eleventh . . ."

Bill took the letter and read it.

"It's the eleventh today," he said, "but they've made a mistake with the Thursday, Gram. They should have put Wednesday."

Gram shook her head. "There now, you see it's my silly old fault for not having a calendar. I'm sorry, lad. You've had the care of it all on your shoulders. But never mind,

you're both safe and well, and you're here, you've come, and that's all that matters!"

As she turned from the fire, Gram caught sight of the cat basket in Merrie's hands.

"Ah, Merrie, love, have you brought Tumbles in your basket, all this long way?" she cried. "Bless you, open it and let the poor creature out. She's as welcome as can be!"

Merrie's face went white. She sat dumbly holding the basket, looking with round, frightened eyes at Gram.

"Ah, poor little love. You're quite worn out." Gram took the basket and Merrie shrank back into her chair, bursting into tears. Bill rose and laid his hand on Gram's arm.

"The basket's empty, Gram. We lost the kitten in New York."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." Gram knelt and put her arms gently round Merrie, and Merrie buried her face in Gram's shoulder.

"Come love, I'm sorry I made you cry. Come now, sit over here nearer the fire." Gram lifted Merrie into her rocking chair and turned to help Bill take off his wet shoes and socks. She drew up a comfortable chair for him, and brought a stool for his bare feet.

It was good to sit so near to the fire. The wind thrust its fingers everywhere, trying the door, picking at the cracks around the windows, crooking into every nook of the old house; but the fire's warmth crept into feet and hands and faces, bringing contentment with it.

Gram placed two mugs of cocoa and plates of cakes and tarts and biscuits on a little table before the fire. She sat down at Bill's side, talking happily as before in her clipped Yorkshire accent. She kept smiling and nodding, pleased at the sight of Bill and Merrie eating hungrily and growing drowsy as they sniffed the lovely mixed odour of pastry and flowers and salt sea air. Soon Merrie was leaning back in her chair, yawning and rubbing her eyes. Gram reached

for the stone hot-water bottles she had placed in a row on the hearth, but before she filled them from the steaming kettle, she leaned across the table to Bill.

"You can't know how glad I am you've come, lad," she said.

"I . . ." Bill gulped and swallowed. He was going to say, "I'm glad, too," but he knew it was a lie. He felt his face grow hot. Gram was watching him with her bright eyes.

Then from one of the covered cages on the settee came a tiny bird-note. Gram laughed and called over her shoulder:

"Tha does right to call out, Jocy Budge. We were all alone and now we've a bit of family. It's lovely to have a bit of family again!" Gram gave Bill a radiant smile, and this time Bill smiled back. Gram understood. She seemed to understand everything without his saying a word.



## Chapter 8

### THE FIGHT

IT was the sea that woke Bill his first morning in Flam-borough. The waves were very near: they seemed to be crashing against his eardrums. When he threw back his covers and sat up, he saw through the window the waves come pounding the wall before *Dyke House*, with the same sound they had when he and Merrie arrived. He wanted to run out on to Gram's terrace and take a flying leap off its edge into the water, to strike out with all his power, ducking and rising and thrashing till he was warm. He grinned at the sun waking beyond the rim of the horizon, and at the shining ranks of billows far out, moving steadily in as if they were at war with the cliffs. What an unruly harbour this was, with the billows sweeping in almost to Gram's kitchen door! Even on this warm sunny day, Bill could feel the spray when he held his face near the window. What must it be like in a storm? What would happen if the sea wall cracked and broke and . . .

Bill turned and swung his legs over the edge of his bed. It was then that he saw the white sea boots on his bedside chair. He picked them up and examined them curiously. They were not new. There were salt-water stains inside, and the letters, B. W. His own initials! Other clothing lay on the chair: a pair of heavy grey socks, and navy-blue trousers with a sweater to match, like those the man in the Bridlington Station had been wearing. Bill took off the striped woollen pyjamas Gram had given him the night before and put on his new clothes. He thrust his feet into the white boots last of all, pulling them over his knees and

up as high as his hips. Everything fitted perfectly, as if made for him, but it was the boots which pleased him, and to which his attention kept coming back. Where had Gram found them? And had she put his initials inside? To look down at them made Bill feel taller and stronger. They made him stride across the room with long, sure steps, and it was as if, now that he had them on, they would have a say in where he went and what he did.

Moving around his room, Bill examined the pictures of sailing ships on the whitewashed walls, the brown chest of drawers with its round mirror attached, the extra bed against the inner wall, the battered sea chest, the small table holding the photograph which he knew must be of his mother as a young girl.

He went out into the dark hall and groped his way along to find the room next to his. Without knocking, he walked to the bed by the window where Merrie lay sleeping. As he stood over her, wondering if he should waken her, she opened her eyes and smiled a slow, contented smile; but soon the smile faded and she sighed and looked away. Bill tugged the covers down over the long flannel nightgown Gram had put on Merrie when she had brought her to bed.

"Come on, lazybones, get up. I want to have a look around outside." He pulled her up by both arms. "Get dressed, and I'll be back in five minutes."

Bill went back to his own room, made his bed, and stood looking out of the window again. The kind of excitement filled him that came when he stood at the edge of Long Island Sound, back in America, and gazed out to sea.

This isn't a bad spot, with the whole North Sea for a front garden. I wonder if Gram owns a boat. Gosh, if only I had *Ginger*! he thought.

Merrie was dressed when Bill returned for her, and she followed him quietly, reaching for his hand in the darkness of the hall. Bill found the staircase he had caught

sight of in the light from his room but, when he and Merrie were halfway down, he realized that it was not the staircase they had climbed with Gram the night before. It was not steep and narrow, but broad and curving, with fine carved oak banisters, and it led into a square hallway. Bill and Merrie crossed the hallway and opened an ornate door to find a huge room with long leaded windows on one side and a large grey stone fireplace on which 1820 was printed in raised letters. A big brass chandelier hung from the ceiling, but the room was completely empty of furniture. They recrossed the hall, tried a second and a third door, both locked, and finally, smiling their relief they entered the kitchen, as warm and cheerful as it had been the night before. A fire glowed in the fireplace, and the bird cages were uncovered now. Pairs and pairs of yellow canaries were singing merrily, and in a larger cage separated from the others, a green and yellow budgerigar was making funny squawking sounds. The table was set for breakfast, and against a bouquet of dahlias under the window was a note:

*Dear Bill and Merrie:*

*If you should come 'ow' before I return, just help yourselves to breakfast. There's milk in the blue jug, and your fry-ups are keeping warm in the oven.*

Bill read the note aloud, and Merrie exclaimed:

"What does she mean, fry-ups? And where's the oven? There isn't even any stove."

Bill's gaze travelled around the room and came to rest on the black iron panels that covered the centre of Gram's deep fireplace. Three of the panels had round knobs on them, and Bill pulled at them till they swung open, one, then the second, then the third, largest one.

"Here they are," said Bill. "Bacon and tomatoes. Funny thing to eat for breakfast, but it smells good." He closed

the iron door and led his sister to the table, to the packets of cold cereal very much like the cereal at home, and the plate of thin buttered slices of bread. He ate a tremendous breakfast, cereal, milk, several pieces of bread and jam, and half Merrie's fry-up as well as his own. As he ate, he glanced at the polished copper ladles and forks and the long-handled warming pan hanging at the fireplace, at the flagstone floor and the great black beams across the ceiling, at the oaken settle against the inner wall and the Toby jugs and china shepherds and shepherdesses on the mantelpiece, at Gram's tiny organ with its flat rectangular top and its short keyboard and its two carpeted pedals.

How quaint it all is, he thought. Everything looks ages old, nothing could have been changed for years, maybe not since 1820.

An iron hook held Gram's copper kettle over the fire. Bill found an oven cloth, and wrapping it round the kettle handle, filled a basin with hot water and washed the dishes while Merrie dried. When the breakfast table was as neat as he could make it, he lifted Merrie up beside the canaries' cages on the window seat, and patted her on the back.

"I'm going to have a look around," he told her. "You just stay here and watch. I'm going to climb over the rocks. It wouldn't be safe for a girl."

He hurried outside, gulping the sea air and stretching his arms as he moved to the edge of the terrace nearest the creek. For a while he stood looking about, trying to see behind the house, and wondering again if Gram owned any sort of boat. He gazed at the cliffs, at the upper parts turning a brilliant pinky-white as the sun touched them, at the lower parts still purple in shadow. He took a few steps back across the terrace and leaped high into the air, landing with a thud in the soft sand at the other side of the creek.

Waving back at his sister, he felt a twinge of conscience at the sight of her pale little face watching from the window. But soon he saw Gram coming home, and knew that

Merrie would be all right without him. He would stay out half an hour, and then go back to see if Gram had any odd jobs for him to do.

He climbed a rough stairway similar to the one he and Merrie had descended the night before. It was like climbing out of a great cave. When he reached the cliff top, he walked along the edge toward Flamborough Head. The air had been still and warm below in the ravine, but on the cliff the wind blew in strong, damp gusts, and Bill slapped his arms and tucked his chin down inside the neck of his sweater. He watched the gulls playing with the wind, using every air pocket and eddy in their game, letting the currents throw them high into the sky, then diving swiftly down. He kept lifting his head and staring out to sea. How much wilder the North Sea was than Long Island Sound, where on clear days one could see the opposite shore!

As he strode quickly along, he glanced down at the breakers below, and suddenly his eyes widened and all thought of returning to *Dyle House* left him. Directly under him, out of sight at one moment and then rearing high and crashing at the next, was the hull of a boat, a sailboat like his or the *Cinger* at home, but bigger and heavier, with a small cabin. Each wave was driving her hard on to the rocks, wrenching and tearing at her. There was no time to lose if he was to save the boat from being smashed to pieces.

Without a second's hesitation, Bill raced back along the edge of the precipice, his feet barely touching the ground, and down the cliff steps to the creek. He did not stop to choose his footholds but jumped over the slippery rocks towards where the boat was coming in. Spray whipped him in blinding showers. Foam heaved itself up in wreaths which broke and scattered over his head as he ran faster and faster, sometimes falling headlong and scrambling up again with his arms and legs smarting where he had

scraped them. Waves rolled in, breaking nearer and nearer to him. He felt a stab of panic. The boat was out of sight around a jutting-out point of cliff. He could not tell how much farther he had to go.

What if I can't get to her at all? he thought. What if the waves are too close to the cliff around the point? The tide might be still coming in. What if the water traps me and I can't get back? But he went on, without slowing his steps, over a fall of red-brown earth not yet washed away, through a muddy waterfall tumbling from the cliff. He reached the point, rounded it, and the boat was before him. The waves had tossed her on to her side and she was being sucked crazily in and out, a few inches closer to the cliffs each time.

Bill ran forward. He crouched behind a rocky ledge as a wave thundered in, then raced towards the sea. He grabbed the boat and dragged her back, with a six-foot wave at his heels, catching up to him, leaping on him till he staggered and fell. He clutched at the boat with one hand, at the jagged rocks with the other, to save himself from being pulled out to sea. The wave drew back and he jumped up, tugging the boat again towards the cliffs. Another wave engulfed him and he held his breath and felt himself rolling from side to side. But now he found he could brace himself against a boulder. He pulled with all his might as another wave lifted the boat and hurled her into a split in the rocks.

Then he leaned back against the boulder, his shoulders heaving, his mouth full of salt water. No other wave came higher than his knees, though he waited five minutes, examining the wreck's lines, and the damage to her hull. She would need stripping inside and out, and big repairs, not only of her cabin but of her planking. But how stout and strong she would be when rebuilt! Bill wanted desperately to have her for his own. He tugged at her once more, and decided that the tide must be going out and that

she would be safe now, he raced back as he had come, leaped over the creek, climbed on to Gram's terrace and burst into the kitchen. Merrie was not there, but Gram was cooking before the fireplace.

"Do you have a length of strong rope, Gram?" he blurted out breathlessly. "I've found a boat. She was being wrecked on the rocks and I dragged her in, but I'll need a rope to get her home."

"I have the very thing, lad, right there in the clothes press. It's not very long, but it's strong and new. You're welcome to it." Gram opened a drawer and hurried across the kitchen with a coil of rough brown rope in her hands. "Eh, lad, you're wet through!" she exclaimed, peering at his matted hair and his soaked sweater and trousers.

"That won't hurt me! I'll be back in a few minutes!" Bill bolted out across the terrace and jumped the creek. Merrie called to him gaily from the window of her room upstairs:

"Come back, Bill! I want to show you something!" But Bill waved without looking, and ran on.

He could not have been more than ten minutes in going for the rope, and yet when he rounded the point he saw with a sinking heart that three boys had arrived. They had tugged the sailing boat several feet closer to the cliffs, and they stood on a high rock, intently studying her, making plans to move her around Flamborough Head. The strongest of the three, a blond-haired, handsome boy as tall as Bill, seemed to be the leader.

"We'll nail a strip of canvas over t'hole. I'll get Dad's dinghy, and we'll tow her round t'Head," he was saying. "She needs work but she'll be a beauty when we've done with her- if t'owner doesn't want her back. She must have pulled loose in t'big wind last night. I think I've seen her moored over in Bridlington Harbour."

Bill strode round the point, holding the rope out before him.

"She's my boat!" he shouted above the waves. "I got to her first. I pulled her in ten minutes ago!"

The boys stared blankly at Bill, then at one another. No one spoke, and Bill moved nearer. All at once there was a high excited shout.

"Who is he, anyway? I never saw him before in my life! Where did he come from?" Bill looked into a fat rosy face with mouth agape and blue eyes round with surprise. But before he could say anything, the tall blond boy jumped down from the rock into the shallow swirling water and sprang forward, throwing his arm possessively over the boat's side. Bill reached her at the same moment, and the two boys stopped face to face.

"Get off it!" said the tall boy in a low, tense voice. "We know t'man she belongs to. And we don't believe you pulled her in. We could see her all t'way from t'Head. T'waves washed her in. Go on now, make yourself small!"

The other two boys stole up behind the tall boy. They put their hands on the boat, too, and together the three began to inch forward, pushing Bill backwards along the wreck's side, toward the sea. The waves came in, splashing high against Bill's white boots, and still the boys pressed slowly against him, edging him out beyond the stern so that he no longer had a handhold.

A flush of anger tingled in Bill's cheeks and he rushed at the boy by his right elbow. There was the crack of his fist, and the boy staggered and fell sideways, striking his head on a rock. Seeing him fall, the other boys let go of the boat and stared in horror. The boy Bill had hit lay still, with one arm bent behind him in an unnatural way, and a wave, higher than the rest, came in and washed over him.

Dazedly Bill threw the rope into the boat and helped the other boys to drag their friend out of reach of the sea, and to place him on the narrow flat space at the base of the cliff point. Bill knelt to listen to the injured boy's



heartbeat, and began to slap his cheeks and rub his hands, while the fat boy stood over him, shouting:

"He's dead! You killed him! You killed him!" But the tall boy, crouching opposite Bill, said:

"He's not dead, Pete; he's knocked out, and his arm's broken. We'll have to get him straight to a doctor. Somebody give me a handkerchief and I'll bind up the cut on his head. Hurry up." It was Bill who drew his handkerchief quickly from his trouser pocket and dipped it into a pool in a hollow of the rock. He shook it and handed it to the tall boy, who snatched it and tied it with deft, expert fingers round the injured boy's forehead.

Soon, pushing Bill away, the other boys stooped to lift their companion under his armpits and thighs. They carried him back the way they had come, and Bill stood by helplessly, noticing for the first time that the injured boy was thin, that he wore short trousers and shabby boots and a torn jacket; and that he was small, much smaller than he himself.

An agony of regret swept over him. He ran after the boys, crying out:

"Let me help! Let me help carry him! I—I'm so sorry . . ." He caught sight of the thin boy's glasses, shattered on the rocks, and reaching down for them, held them out as he ran. But the tall boy shouted back angrily:

"Go on home to your mother, whoever you are!" Bill stopped, put the broken glasses in a pocket of his trousers, and watched as the boys picked their way over the rocks. He watched till they were out of sight. The last thing he heard was:

"It's a good thing t' tide's going out or we'd all be dead ducks."

There was nothing for Bill to do but turn back, with his legs in the strong white boots feeling heavier and heavier as he crossed the rocks on his way to Gram's little bay. Water trickled down his cheeks, his teeth chattered with

cold, and his hair fell in salty strings over his forehead. He had glanced at the boat as he passed, without really caring what happened to her. But when he was halfway home, he stopped and slowly retraced his steps. He picked up the rope Gram had given him, fastened it to a cleat near her stern, and began to pull her towards the creek. His legs and arms stung and ached, but he kept on, his head low and his shoulders pressing forward, tugging each time a high wave dashed in to help him.

An hour later, when the tide had gone out, leaving a broad corridor between the waves and the cliff foot, Bill brought the wreck around the headland, and into the shallow water of the creek. He dragged her up the creek bank and into the sheltered place on the landward side of Gram's terrace. Then he leaned against her, gazing at the gaping hole in her hull, and at the ruin that had been her tiny cabin. Tangles of rigging lay everywhere about her; her gunwales were in splinters; her mast had been broken till only the battered stub of it remained. But her cockpit was hardly damaged; even the bottom boards were there, intact. Bill saw now that she was quite unlike *Ginger*. She was built in the shape of the North Sea fishing cobbles, with short ends to fight heavy seas, and with a forefoot as sharp as a knife. She had neither keel nor centre-board, but she had two thick strips of wood fitted aft, for gripping the sand when she was to be dragged up on to the beach.

Bill climbed wearily on to the terrace and circled *Dyke House* to the kitchen door. Gram and Merrie came quickly towards him, and Merrie thrust a soft furry ball into his arms.

"Look at her, Bill!" she sang. "Gram brought her! Gram borrowed our cat basket and went out early this morning to get her. Isn't she lovely? Look at her big eyes. She's almost exactly like our Tumbles. We're going to call her 'Tumbles the Second'!"

Bill felt a tiny rough tongue against his hand, and saw his sister throw back her head and laugh with joy. She would not let him keep the kitten long. When Gram placed a saucer of milk on the floor, Merrie set the kitten down gently, stroking her and whispering to her:

"Come, Tumbles, come along, Tumbles!" Bill watched his sister walk towards the milk. She took a few steps and came back and started away again. After a while, the kitten began to follow her on wobbly legs, mewling. Merrie picked her up, so gently it was as if she were afraid to touch her, and showed her how to drink, dipping her fingers in the milk and letting the kitten lick them.

Bill washed his cuts and bruises at the sink, and Gram brought bandages to bind them. She did not speak of his hurts as she cared for them: she did not even ask him questions about the boat. But Bill noticed that she was studying him, and shaking her head, chuckling to herself. Suddenly he remembered that he had not yet mentioned his new clothes.

"Gee, Gram," he said, "I forgot all about thanking you for the trousers and sweater and socks, and especially for the boots. These are the best boots I ever saw."

A look of pride came to Gram's face as she said, "I'm glad you like the boots, lad. They were your grandfather's. He was known by them, and I don't think the other fishermen would have worn white boots even if they'd been able to buy them. I've never seen another pair like them in the village. I've been saving them. I didn't just know why. But when I saw you last night, I knew they'd fit."

"Oh, that explains the initials inside," said Bill. "Isn't it strange that Grandfather had the same initials as I have . . ."

"He had the same first name, lad, but we all called him 'Billy', even the men of the fleet. Bless him, he had lots of friends. The men kept him cox'n of the lifeboat for fifteen years."

Bill stared down at the boots, gathering courage to tell Gram about the boat and the fight. His throat tightened and his heart beat wildly. The words were on the tip of his tongue; but suddenly it was too late. Behind him, Merrie, with the kitten in her arms, burst out happily:

"Please, Gram, would you rock me in your rocking chair, Tumbles and me—just like Mommie does!"

## Chapter 9

### GUILTY CONSCIENCE

DINNER TIME passed, and still Bill had not told Gram about the accident. As he dried the dishes and helped to feed the canaries, he kept wondering about the thin boy. Was he conscious again? Was his arm badly broken? What if someone came to tell Gram before he himself told her? He watched absently as Gram opened the door of the biggest of the bird cages under the window and the green-and-yellow budgerigar darted out to swoop around the room and flutter to a stop on Gram's hand.

"Joey," said Gram, smoothing the little bird's feathers with one finger, "Joey, I want thee to meet my grandson. Bill, this is Joey Budge."

Bill's mouth opened in amazement at Joey's croak, "Now then, now then!"

"He talks so well! I bet a budgies could talk, but I never thought you could really understand them," said Bill.

"Ah, he talks right enough. He gives me no peace sometimes. He used to live in a turnhouse up on the moors. He speaks broad Yorkshire, and he knows some bad words as well, I'm afraid. There, he's using them now to scold the kitten." Gram laughed down at Merrie and Tumbles, playing on the hearthrug. She scooped Joey back into his cage, and soon he went to sleep. The room filled with warm sunshine, the canaries trilled softly, and Bill seated himself against the cushions of the settle opposite the window. But a moment later Gram said:

"I've just had an idea. It's a perfect day for a picnic. Let's go to North Landing and watch the fishing boats come in."

Merrie jumped up from the hearth to help Gram make sandwiches. Bill crossed the kitchen to help, too, but his hands were slow and unwilling. He told himself:

"We'll pass the sailboat on the way, and Gram will ask why I haven't been saying anything about her, and what am I going to answer?" He watched Gram put on her black hat with its bunch of purple flowers, and her wide grey cloak. He watched Merrie lay the new kitten down to sleep on the hearth. It was when she came skipping to him to draw him to the door that he thought of an excuse for staying home. He would say he needed to write a letter to the Professor, to tell him they had arrived safely. He began to speak, but found Gram swinging the picnic basket towards him.

"Come along, lad," she laughed, "and you'll soon be looking at the finest cobbles and the best fishermen in England!" Bill could think of nothing to do but take the basket and open the door for Gram, and follow her as she hurried with her bobbing step across the terrace—but by the longer way, around the south side of *Dyke House*, not towards where the derelict lay! Bill gave a sigh of relief as he lifted his sister down from the terrace and guided her through Gram's lovely garden of chrysanthemums and dahlias to a narrow path leading back into the ravine, winding under the arches of giant oaks. Gram did not look back as they walked along, and Bill knew that she had led them the longer way on purpose. She was aware that the boat was there. She had decided that for some reason he didn't want to tell her about it yet, and she was trying to make things easy for him. He smiled at her, and his voice was bright when he said:

"I've just this minute thought about our suitcase, Gram. I hid it last night so I could carry Merrie. It's behind a tree along the road up there above us. We'll pick it up on our way home from the picnic."

The path branched to the right, up the side of the ridge.

Bill could see through the trees the rustic bridge he and Merrie had crossed the night before.

"This is Danes Dyke, lad," said Gram as she climbed. "When the Danes came to England, they used it as a wall to defend themselves. That was a few hundred years ago, but our people still have a Danish look about them. Blue, blue eyes and blond hair. And the fishermen—ah, they're big and handsome. We Flamborough folk are very proud of our fishermien."

It was not until Bill's eyes were level with the cliff top that he saw the little house standing close to the edge of the ravine, behind a hedge of gnarled hawthorn. It was a queer, narrow house made of a gypsy caravan, with a lean-to built on to the front of it. Poor and tumble-down though it was it was surrounded by beds of flowers, and its window frames were brightly painted. No smoke came from its tin chimney, and Bill thought it was deserted. He was surprised when Gram said:

"I've just a bit of something in the basket I'd like to leave here, Bill, if you don't mind. I won't be a minute. If you'd like to come in with me, you'll see two more kittens like our Tumblers I got here early this morning." Gram crossed the garden and knocked at a rickety door. A voice from inside called weakly:

"Is that Liza? Come in, love. I didn't expect tha'd be back so soon." Gram opened the door and crossed the room to a narrow iron bedstead where a woman lay. Behind Gram, Bill could not see the woman's face, but he could see every part of the room, a bare little room with very little furniture in it—a round table covered with an embroidered cloth, two straight-backed chairs, a black stove with its pipe leading up through the roof, another bed like the first. Bill started towards the corner where the kittens were playing in their box, but suddenly he turned back. The woman in the bed was saying in a shaking voice, as if she had been crying.

"Liza, ah, Liza, Tim's hurt. He's hurt bad. He's been taken to hospital. Oh, Liza, I'm that worried . . ."

Bill's heart turned over. He reached into his trousers pocket and felt the broken circles of the thin boy's glasses. The edges seemed jagged and huge. He jerked his hand away, telling himself it could have been some other accident. The two bigger boys hadn't called the thin boy "Tim," had they? But he knew it was Tim he had hurt even before the woman went on:

"They laid him there by t'stove, and he was so white, and I couldn't do a thing for him, Liza. One arm was bent right back. T'ambulance came nobbut an hour since."

When Gram called Bill and Merrie to her, Bill wanted to run away. He was sure that Tim's mother would see from his face that he was the one who had injured her son. He was sure the boys had noticed his American accent. They must have told the woman it was an American who had hurt Tim. Above the beating of his heart, Bill heard:

"Eh, Liza, t'boy's t'sworn image of thy Billy. Even t'same colou han, and it s not oft you see hair that colour. Nay, I've never seen a closer likeness. He could be his grandfather dropped down from Heaven to begin life again, that he could! It makes me feel right queer seeing him there in those white boots." Tim's mother lowered her voice, addressing Bill:

"Now then, lad, and if you're like your grandfather, you'll be a credit to your Gram, t'whole village and all!"

Bill forced himself to meet the woman's eyes, and then hung his head. Smiling, patting him on the shoulder, Gram asked him to bring the shepherd's pie from the picnic basket. He bent over the basket, glad to be turning his back as he lifted out an earthenware dish, still warm from the oven.

It was decided that Bill and Merrie should go on to North Landing alone, so Gram could stay to care for her



friend. As Bill picked up the basket and led Merrie away from the kittens, he heard Tim's mother whisper:

"Ah, poor lad. He's right shy, seemingly. Our Tim's always been t'same."

Holding Merrie's hand, Bill walked with long strides away from the caravan house. He stopped halfway down the shore road, found the suitcase, opened it to make sure everything was still there, and left it in its hiding place. He went on with Merrie skipping at his side, through the winding streets of the village, past the old church grey and pale in the sun, past the tiny shops and the white-washed cottages with their red tiled roofs. And all the way, he felt that a hundred eyes were watching him. Women coming out of the narrow side streets with their shopping baskets looked up with gleaming eyes; old fishermen smoking their pipes in the shadows of the cottages stopped talking and stared over their shoulders; a group of girls on the corner near the village post office smiled at Merrie, at her lovely face and her pretty curls, and then, when they turned their eyes to Bill, their expressions became curious and wondering—and was Bill only imagining it or were the looks unfriendly? Had the news of the fight already spread through the village?

Bill was glad when he and Merrie reached the open country where there was no one in sight, where there were no houses, but only fields, and the smell and sound of the sea. They passed an enclosure where two shaggy donkeys grazed, and meadows where sheep were bleating. Far to the right was a tall white lighthouse. Near it was a crumbling lookout tower, built when the Vikings sailed out of Norway's fjords to raid the British coasts. And ahead, at the end of a long straight road, were white precipices, rising over a bay much larger than Gram's, broad and dazzling blue in the sunshine, and dotted with gaily painted fishing cobs. Some were drawn up on to the beach, others rocked at the water's edge; and working in

and around them were the dark-clothed figures of fishermen, like toy men, they were so far below.

Bill carried Merrie down the long concrete stairway to the beach. Leaving her in a safe place, he crossed the sand and waded into the water just as the last of the cobbles was coming into the harbour, tossing up spray as she swayed and dipped towards the shore. Bill stood knee-deep in the splashing waves and stared at the three men inside the coble, men whose deep-lined faces and broad backs and hard muscles told of the crude, hard, independent life they led at sea. One, an enormously tall, broad man with huge shoulders and strong red arms, turned off the motor, banged a pair of great oars into their rowlocks, and rowed with powerful strokes till the coble veered around and came swiftly, stern foremost, into shallow water. Bill moved to the place where the boat would strike the beach. He saw that she was named the *New Hope*, and that her owner's name, lettered on her port side, was John Marvell.

An old man with his oilskin over his shoulder jumped from the *New Hope* into the waves. Then a young man carrying a basketful of crabs leaped down almost on top of Bill. The basket slipped, and Bill plunged his arms down, lifting it quickly and carrying it to the shore. There he waited, grinning as the tall, blue-eyed, blond young man approached him.

"Eh, thanks, lad. Nearly lost part of our haul that time. Here, give us a hand with t'rest now you've got yourself wet. 'By, what a catch we've had today. Best of t'season, eh, Dad?" The young man's teeth flashed as he called to the giantlike man coiling rope in the boat's prow.

"Aye, George," came the reply, "but there's hardly a lobster in t'lot. That's t'price tha pays. Now I like to see a nice haul of lobsters."

"You'd need a lot of lobsters to be worth what this lot's worth, Dad," said George. The big man moved to the middle thwart to lift a basket brimming with crabs down

to Bill. Bill took the basket, staggering under its weight, but struggling to the shore without falling. He went back for another, and as he grasped it, he caught George winking at his father. But he went on working, laughing happily, helping to drag the *New Hope* on to the shore and to empty her of the crab pots brought in to be mended, helping to draw downhill the heavy cable that was to pull the boat up on to the slipway. When the cable had been secured to the *New Hope's* stern, the big man waved his arm and the winch, high above the slipway in its shed, began its slow "put-put-put." Then as the cable moved up the slope of the beach, Bill and George raced back and forth, thrusting planks in her path so that she should not sink too deeply into the sand.

When the boat was secure on the slipway, the three fishermen, with Bill in their midst, walked with long slow steps back to the water's edge to examine the day's catch. Bill found himself glancing again and again at the old man as he lit his pipe and puffed at it, smiling in enjoyment. He was a shabby old man with scraggly white hair and a bushy beard, and the gnarled look of a tree which has stood for years against the winds. Bill watched him pick up some sand and let it run through his hands, hard hands, as powerful as any younger man's. All the old man's movements gave the impression of energy, though he must have been over seventy. Bill noticed that George addressed him in a frank, respectful way when he said:

"Eh, Bob, today's luck makes me right sorry t'crabbing season's only a month to go. I'd sooner crab than fish any day."

"Aye," said the old man, "but there's nowt like being in t'bait house of a cold winter's evening, and t'fire going in t'stove, and a few of us in there baiting t'lines. There's nowt as cozy as that in summer." For some reason, when he had spoken, the old man looked at Bill with the serious, wondering expression Bill had noticed on the faces of the

people in the village. But there was something special about the look, something in the sharp blue eyes that startled Bill.

It grew quiet on the shore. Most of the fishermen had already mounted the hill, some of them following their catches as the winch drew them up the slipway in heavy, boxlike sleds, and then carrying the baskets of crabs one by one to the lorries on the cliff road. With an impatient gesture, the big man pointed towards the concrete runway where two donkeys climbed, each bearing four baskets of crabs.

"Where are our two donkeys?" he demanded. "What's that lad thinking of, not being here with t'donkeys?" He turned to George. "Go along up, lad, and tell Rolf to get down here with those donkeys as fast as his legs will carry him. And then get along home to thy tea. Tell thy mother I'll be there inside an hour."

Next he addressed the old man.

"Tha'd best go along now, too, Bob. I'll stay around a while. I've a few jobs to see to while I'm waiting."

"Thanked, John. I'll be seeing thee at cockerow to-morrow then." The old fisherman picked up his oilskin, his sou'wester and his lunch tin, and began the climb up the cement stairway. Several times he stopped to stare back at Bill, and had Bill been nearer, he would have heard Old Bob mutter:

"Billy White Boots, bless me, if it isn't Billy White Boots come back!" And with a sigh, "Blow me, Billy lad, tha's dropped down to work amongst us same as tha always did do!"

With his face showing his eagerness, Bill stepped forward.

"I'll carry a few of the baskets up the hill, Mr. Marvell, while you're waiting for the donkeys," he offered. John Marvell smiled at him.

"Good lad," he said. "But tha'd best make it only one

basket and then be done. Tha'll find it's heavier work than tha thinks." Mr. Marvell watched as Bill lifted a basket of crabs, swung it to his back, holding it by the rope attached to its handles, and mounted the stairway. When Bill returned for a second basket, and then, with perspiration running down his cheeks, for a third, Mr. Marvell chuckled to himself. By the time Bill had come back to the beach for the fourth time, George had reached the shore, leading the two donkeys Bill and Merrie had passed on their way to North Landing. George said:

"No sign of Rolf, Dad. I went all t'way home. Mother hasn't seen him since morning. But I met Pete Kickaby in t'village, and he said Tim Prudem was hurt under t'cliffs this morning."

"Young Tim Prudem, tha says? Eh, that's a shame. What happened, did t'lad fall?"

"Nav, t'wasn't an accident. According to Pete, some young fellow came along and knocked Tim down. Pete said he saw it happen and it was no accident. T'ambulance came to take Tim to hospital, and Rolf went along with him."

"And is young Tim badly hurt, then?"

"Pete didn't now. T'lad's arm's broken. He didn't know what else."

"Eh, well, I'm sorry. Tim's mother needed all t'help he could give her as it was," said Mr. Marvell.

Bill felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach as he helped to load the donkeys, as he tied the baskets over the thick pads of straw on their backs. George pulled at the baskets to make sure they were secure, and said:

"Now then, lad, I'm going to show you how to drive a donkey up t'hill!" Bill blushed and glanced at the cliff top, afraid that the boy called Rolf would come. He took hold of the rope bridle of one of the donkeys, and soon he had to give all his attention to keeping his foothold on the slipway and imitating George's cries:

"Huey, huey! Huey-ya! Go on there! Get along there! Huev-ya!"

"They're only young ones. They don't know their work yet," George explained, laughing, when Bill's donkey balked halfway up the hill and began to back slowly down, while Bill pushed with all his might from behind.

Bill went on working till the last basket of crabs had been carried to the cliff top, then the last of the damaged crab pots. He was breathing hard when he turned down the hill to Merrie.

"Well, so long," he called. "I'll come give you a hand again soon!"

"Eh, by gum," Mr. Marvell grinned, calling Bill back, "tha's forgotten to ask for payment, lad."

Bill stared at him in surprise. "But it didn't seem like work!" he exclaimed.

George chuckled at that. "It'd be work soon enough if he was forced to do it day in and day out, eh, Dad? He'd change his tune if he had to get up at high tide mornings, rain or shine. It's not so bad just now, with high tide at six, but how about cold winter mornings when we're out at three or four in t'pitch black? Say, Dad, we ought to hire him and show him what work is!"

In a flash, Bill thought of the derelict lying against Gram's terrace. It would be expensive to rebuild her. He would need a thousand things, from screws to sails. He burst out:

"Oh, would you hire me, sir? I'd work hard, and I know a bit about boats and and I'd work from morning till night!"

"Aye, and school starts in two weeks," George reminded him.

"Oh . . . I didn't know . . ." said Bill in confusion.

"Look thee, lad . . ." began Mr. Marvell. He got no further. There was a shout from the road.

"There's Rolf now, Dad," said George. "There he

comes just when all t'work's over and done with. Still, it may be that Tim needed him at t'hospital."

Rolf Marvell strode up to Bill and seized him by both shoulders. Bill's head reeled as he heard the words he had heard earlier that day, not shouted but hissed at him this time:

"Go on home to your mother!" He stood frozen in his tracks, listening to Rolf cry out to his father, "He's the one who hurt 'Tim! He knocked Tim down and broke his arm, and Tim's nothing like as big as he is! And you just ought to see Tim! He's been in terrible pain all day! He looks like he's go'ng to die!" Thin-lipped, with eye blazing, Rolf raised his fists and lunged at Bill.

"You're a bully, that's what you are, a bully!" he shouted, striking at Bill's chest again and again. Bill did little more than raise his arms to defend himself, and soon it was too late to fight, for George dragged his brother away. Bill addressed Mr. Marvell in a dazed and lifeless voice, as if he stood before a judge.

"I did knock that boy down. I'm sorry I hurt him . . ." He hung his head and felt his heart beat sickeningly. But soon anger rose in him and made his words level and clear.

"It wasn't a fair fight," he said. "There were three to one and she was my boat. I got to her first. I dragged her in, and when those three fellows tried to take her away from me, I guess I lost my temper. I kept thinking, what right have they to grab her when I dragged her in?"

There was nothing more to say and Bill walked away, down the hill towards where Merrie was waiting. He would not let himself hurry, but all the way he was struggling to control the quivering of his chin, and all the way he could hear Rolf talking excitedly to his father, saying:

"He's lying, Dad! You should have been there to see it. He picked on 'Tim because 'Tim was t'smallest! He's the worst bully I ever saw! Who is he, anyway?"

Bill sat down at one edge of the cloth Merrie had spread on the sand for the picnic. He answered her questions about the fishermen and their boat, but his words had no zest in them, and as if to spite him, his ears kept listening for sounds from the cliff top. He could hear voices above him, but he could no longer tell what was being said. He heard Marvell's lorry turn around and mount the curving hill to the Flamborough road, he listened till the whirr of the motor died away. Then he sat quietly eating the sandwiches Gram and Merrie and he had prepared, and watching the gulls circling and striking down into the harbour with quick little splashes.

The sun sank lower and shadows crept across North Landing. Puffs of wind blew thru showers of sand across the picnic cloth and left a pile against the thermos of warm tea. Soon Bill and Merrie packed the picnic things away and hurried back to the currier's house, stopping on the way to bring the suitcase from the bracken. Holding both the suitcase and the picnic basket, Bill waited outside in Prudence's garden, so that he would not have to speak to Jim's mother again. And all the way to *Dike House* he rehearsed what he would say to Gram when she caught sight of the wrecked boat. Finally, just before the ravine path made its turn toward the sea, he blurted out:

"You know that boat I told you I found, Gram . . . Well, she's there by the terrace. She's badly damaged, but I brought her home. See, there she is."

Gram saw the sailing boat before Bill finished speaking. She quickened her steps and soon she was running her hands along the hull, and going down on her knees, working her hand through the hole.

"This is a bit of luck, lad," she said. "There are no ribs broken, and the damage isn't right aft, nor under the fore-foot where the new planks would need a lot of bending."

"You know about boats," said Bill, unbelievably.

"Ah, yes, a bit." Gram laughed. "Your grandfather and



I used to sail." She turned her attention back to the wreck. "She was built for speed, lad. She must have been a beauty in a strong wind. It's the part below the water that counts in making speed. Look at her wonderful curving lines."

"I found her around there, below the cliffs, Gram." Bill pointed. "I got to her first. I—you see . . ." But Gram went on:

"I think it might be best if you announced you've found her— in the Bridlington papers, you know, lad— and then if her owner comes to claim her, we'll offer to buy her, and just hope he doesn't ask too much!"

"Yes, and I can be working on her in the meantime." Bill's anticipation was growing again. "I'll have to go to Bridlington after my tools, and I'll have to find some wood somewhere . . ."

"There's wood up in the loft, lad," said Gram. "There's some spruce and some oak, and a few pine timbers. You're welcome to it, and to anything else you find up there. We'll go and have a look in the morning."

"Thanks ever so much, Gram," said Bill. "I'm going to try to get a job somewhere to pay for the parts I'll have to buy. Professor gave me a hundred dollars, that's about £37, and I still have about £31 left, but I don't think I ought to spend that on the boat. It should be for emergencies, and besides, I'd really like to pay for everything to do with the boat myself. I could go on working an hour or two a day even after school starts. I used to help in a boat-building yard sometimes, back home." Gram nodded. She seemed as pleased about the boat as he was.

"There's where her name was," she pointed out. "The letters must have been in metal. They've been torn away." Bill knelt down, deciphering the name from the marks on the derelict's prow.

"She was called the *Fury*, Gram. I like that name, don't you? Let's keep to that."

It was growing dark and cold, and Bill, Merrie and

Gram hurried into the kitchen. While Bill poked up the fire in the fireplace, Gram lit the oil lamps, made cocoa, and brought out munch and parkin, lemon-curd tarts, date pasty, and other Yorkshire delicacies. The talk was light and gay, and Bill laughed with Gram and Merrie when Joey Budge perched on the chair above Tumbles to scold her, and then, as if he had decided to be friends, alighted on the kitten's soft back and preened himself contentedly.

But when Merrie was dressed for bed, Bill realized that he could not stay in the kitchen alone with Gram. He knew it would change everything when Gram learned the whole truth about the boat, and he could not bear to sit talking with her, keeping his secret to himself. He said he was tired, and climbing the stairs with Merrie, he tucked her into bed and went to his own room. He undressed, put on the pyjamas Gram had given him, and got into bed, leaving the white boots on the chair where he had found them that morning. He pulled the covers tight round his neck, but he could not go to sleep. He could not even make himself keep his eyes closed. He sat up, hunched over the window sill, looking out at a sea that sparkled like diamonds as the moon rose.

He thought about his first day in Flamborough, and remembered the Professor's saying:

"You go over there and make a success of it. Everything depends on that."

He opened the window and let the sea air fill the room. He stayed as he was a long time, with his chin in his hands and his eyes on the water. He kept making resolutions, resolving to do the things which would make the Professor see he was being a success. He would go out and find a job, that was the first thing. And when school started, he would work till he was first in the class. He would not stop till he could write and tell the Professor he had the highest marks and the best sports record in the whole school. And he

would use every spare minute for rebuilding the *Fury*; he would make her the finest sailing boat Flamborough had ever seen. Thinking about what he would do made him pound his fist into his hand, as if he were urging on his team back at home. But the memory of the fight and of knocking Tim down stole back into his mind and drove the other thoughts away. He shivered and closed the window. He lay on his back on top of his covers, wide-eyed and wakeful.

Suddenly he jumped up, pulled his trousers and sweater over his pyjamas, fumbled in his pocket for Tim Pruden's glasses, and ran out along the hall, down the stairs and into the kitchen. Gram had brought the oil lamp from the central beam of the kitchen ceiling and placed it on the organ. She was bending forward over the keys, playing hymns from her hymn book, when she heard Bill's tight, strained voice:

"It was I who hurt that boy, Gram! I - I didn't mean to hurt anyone, I just got excited, I wanted the boat so much. So I knocked down the boy nearest me. If you don't believe me, here are his glasses!"

Gram turned in her chair, and Bill ran to her, almost throwing the broken glasses into her lap. He wheeled around and fled back to his room, and lay with his face buried in his pillow, praying that Gram would not come, listening with all his being for the sound of her footstep. But it was only the thudding of the waves that broke the stillness of the old house.

## Chapter 10

### THE FISHING FLEET

BILL awoke with a start when Fumbles came mewing to him. He reached down and lifted the kitten to his bed, where she snuggled against him, purring. A mist pressed against the window, and it was light enough for him to see her staring at him with bright, inquiring eyes. Then the foghorn sounded from the lighthouse. It gave a loud blast which echoed and re-echoed around the headland. Bill held his wrist near the window and looked at his watch. It was ten past five. He sat up, wide awake with a sudden inspiration. Leaving Fumbles in the warm spot where he had been lying, he dressed quickly and crept downstairs in his stocking feet, holding his white boots in his hands.

Outside it was very still, and the terrace was wet from last night's rain. Bill sat at a corner of the sea wall to put on his boots, and gazed out over the beach over the pale water, and up at the cliffs like shadowy giants standing guard over *Dyke House*. Stretching his arms, he rose, crossed the terrace, and leaped over the *Fury*. He turned, surprised to see that the boat was covered with a tarpaulin now, though he had not asked Gram for one. Lifting the edges of the tarpaulin, he thought again about how he would repair the cabin. Then he ran along the ravine path, through mist hanging so heavily that it seemed he could reach out and grasp it in his hands. He ran through the dripping woods, up on to the cliff, and past the caravan house where Tim Prudem and his mother lived. He chose a new route to Flamborough Village, along the edge of

the big farm where haystacks stood in two long rows, and over the new-ploughed earth of the fields farther inland. As he strode quickly along the furrows, early morning sounds were everywhere around him. The foghorn moaned, a bell peeled, a dog barked, the blackbirds sang in the hedges, a rooster crowed. He hurried faster, spurred on by the damp and the cold, till he turned into the road from which he could see the rooftops of the village, swathed in white below him. He ran downhill, past lighted cottages where fishermen were preparing to go to sea, then out on to the road he and Merrie had taken the day before. Sheep were eating the long grass in the gullies at each side of the road, and they ran together across the fields and turned to watch him as he passed.

He reached North Landing and stood on the precipice, looking down. Not a soul was in sight. The tide was in and it was calm, with only the softest fringe of waves on the shore; and the mist was lifting, twisting and rolling, with bits of light breaking from it, as though the sun were wrapped inside it. Holding his arms in front of himself for warmth, Bill rounded the cliff top. As he went down the road to the life-boat house, a man on a bicycle passed him, with a basket of cod balanced on his handlebars. And as he started down the stairway to the beach, Mr. Marvell's lorry drew up behind him. He retraced his steps towards the lorry, his heart beating hard. Mr. Marvell opened the cab door to climb down, but when he saw Bill, he sat back, exclaiming:

"Well, blow me if t'lad hasn't come back!"

Bill caught a glimpse of Rolf Marvell and another boy - he knew it was Pete Rickaby - jumping down at the far side of the cab; but George, who had been riding on the back of the lorry with Old Bob, came around to Bill's side and grinned up at his father.

"He wants t'job, Dad. Hire him," he urged. "He's game all right, turning up after what Rolf said to him. Strikes

me he's got a share of what went to make his granddad t'best man in t'fleet when he was alive."

"You knew my grandfather? You know who I am?" cried Bill.

"Aye, lad, we know. We knew t'minute we clapped eyes on those white boots and heard thy strange manner of speaking—for strange it is, and no mistake," said Mr. Marvell. He studied Bill in silence before going on:

"Let's hear what you have to say about it, lad. What happened yesterday morning? How did yon lad get hurt? His arm's broken in two places, tha knows. T'doctors say it'll be a lucky thing if it comes right again."

Bill's face went white. He stared at the ground and ran his hand over his forehead.

"I'm sorry. I hope he'll be all right. I . . . I guess I hit him because I was so crazy to get the boat back." He described what had happened at the cliff foot, and when he had finished, Mr. Marvell said:

"We'll mark it down as an accident then, young lad, and we'll hire thee, one hour mornings, helping us get t'boat to sea, and three hours afternoons, bunging t'donkeys down, cleaving t'boat, boiling and packing t'crabs and cutting up t'bait for t'next day. We'll pay thee a pound a week, same as Rolf and Pete, but only for t'two weeks till school begins, mind. Alter that tha works nobbut a bit afternoons. It's regulations. And look here, lad . . ." Mr. Marvell leaned down from the cab. "Tha'd best keep thy fists to thyself after this."

The big fisherman jumped down from the cab and called in a booming voice over his shoulder, "Rolf and Pete, come here!" A minute passed before the two boys appeared, arm in arm, glowering their disapproval. Mr. Marvell said, "We're giving this lad a try, and we're having no fratching or I'll knock thy heads together, dost hear?"

"I won't work with him, Dad!" growled Rolf.

"Then do without thy pay. It was an accident with yon

Tim Pruden. T'lad's sorry about it. Now tha must forget it. Thee also, young Pete."

Pete followed Mr. Marvell, George and Old Bob away to help to prepare the *New Hope* for launching. Old Bob caught Bill's eye as he plodded by, and an intent, troubled look passed between them. But soon Bill had to give all his attention to Rolf, who climbed on to the back of the lorry and began to give orders:

"Bring those lunch tins out of t'cab and then come around here and catch t'pots when I throw them."

With his eyes sparkling in his eagerness, Bill grasped the crab pots which had been brought in and mended, and stacked them at the side of the road. He had to work at top speed to put each pot down and be back under the lorry when Rolf heaved the next over the side. Rolf threw so carelessly that, by the time the lorry was unloaded, Bill's hands were bruised and bleeding. But he grinned when Rolf commanded:

"Now down to t'beach with them, four at a time. Look sharp, and when you've carried t'pots you can come back for t'empty baskets, all twenty-four of them!"

Bill plodded back and forth between the hilltop and the water's edge while Rolf swept out the back of the lorry and carried down the baskets of bait.

"What I've been doing used to be Tim Pruden's job—before yesterday," said Rolf meaningfully, as he and Bill began one of their trips down the slipway together.

When the *New Hope* had been pushed over her skids to the water's edge, and the baskets and pots had been stowed into her, Bill waded out till the waves slapped at the tops of his boots, to straighten the prow while the others pushed with their backs against the stern. Old Bob pulled himself aboard and lifted the canvas cover from the boat's motor. Then Bill stood aside, and with a final shove, Mr. Marvell and George gave a jump and clung to the stern, flung their legs over it, and climbed aboard. While

Old Bob worked with the motor, Mr. Marvell fitted the rudder and tiller into place, and George steered with a long-handled oar, out into deeper water. Next George slid both oars into their rowlocks and rowed out, keeping the *New Hope's* prow steady, moving her away from the rocks till Old Bob succeeded in starting her motor.

It was nearing six-thirty when the fleet of a dozen cobbles chugged one by one through the opening between the cliffs. The men, three in each boat, seemed to forget the land as soon as they left it. They gazed seaward, off to open stretches where the sun was rising quickly now, throwing spangles on to the waves. But Bill noticed that in the stern of Marvell's boat, Bob stood shading his eyes, with his face turned back towards the shore, and Bill felt certain that the old man was looking straight at him.

Letting himself down to the sand, Bill watched till the fleet was out of sight beyond the cliffs. Before him, North Landing was welcoming softly at first, hesitantly, but as the greyness left it, he could see things he had not noticed before, the twisting caves in the cliffsides, some of them half full of water, the poor little sandpipers running at the water's edge, the pebbles around him that glittered in a thousand colours as the sunlight touched them.

Sinking back he buried his elbow in the sand. He did not change his position when Rolf and Pete came towards him, but he kept his eyes on them, noticing Rolf's powerful build, his ruddy face and his hair, so light it was silver in the sun. Rolf and Pete made a sharp contrast. Rolf was tall and slim, and Pete short and plump, with a big face and bright red cheeks under tousled hair. His black woollen jersey, stretched tight across his chest, gave him a soft, pudgy look as he bobbed along at Rolf's side, taking two steps to each of Rolf's strides. Rolf held his hands in his trousers pockets, but Pete's darted everywhere, sketching images in the air as he described a conversation he had had with some of the village girls. He talked quickly, with



winks and grins, and every sentence ended in a burst of laughter. He did not stop talking till Rolf came to a halt over Bill's legs and said coldly:

"You've got check, asking my father for a job after what you've done. You won't make me believe it was an accident. Why'd you have to pick on poor Tim? Why didn't you hit me or Pete here? Why didn't you pick on somebody your own size? I don't care if you are Liza Wade's grandson. You'll not get away with it. You'll be sorry before you're finished. And what are you lazing around for? You're not done working yet. You've to carry t'skids back. Come on now, get a move on!"

Bill said nothing, and Rolf and Pete went away slowly up the slipway. When they reached the top, they stood talking together and looking down at Bill, who lay in the sand exactly as they had left him. Before they went on towards the village, Bill heard in the clear air the words, 'Blacking Yank!'

After waiting ten minutes longer, Bill stood up with a sigh and carried the skids up the hill, stacking them on the slope where the Maxwells kept their boat. Then he climbed to the hilltop and ambled slowly back through Flamborough Village to Dances Dyke. With a series of leaps, he ran down the path into the ravine. But on the terrace before *Dyke House* he slowed his steps and approached the kitchen door uneasily, wondering what he could say to Gram after last night. Telling himself it was only half past six, and Gram was probably still asleep, he opened the door and entered to find the old woman kneeling at the hearth, lifting the ashes into a bucket with a small shovel. She had lit the fire, but it was not burning well. It was smoky and film, and grey. Crossing the room quietly, Bill stood over her and said:

"Gee, Gram, you ought to let me . . ." Then he stopped because Gram's hands flew into the air and she laughed.

"Eh, lad, you did give me a start! I thought you were in bed!"

"Oh, I've been up quite a while." Bill smiled. "I was going to say I'll build the fire, Gram. I'll do it every morning when I come home from work."

"You—you don't mean to say you've gone out and found a job already?" Gram's eyes danced as Bill answered:

"I've been working an hour and a half already—for Mr. Marvell."

"Saints above!" cried Gram. "And on an empty stomach! I can see I'm going to have to keep an eye on you, young fellow!"

Bill remembered everything then, and looked away, but presently he felt Gram leaning on his arm to raise herself.

"Come on, lad," she said. "Build this fire up nice and bright for me while I make breakfast, and when we've eaten, you and I are going to the loft to see what there is that can be of use in the rebuilding."

Bill squatted before the fireplace, making Gram's little fire into a pyramid of sticks and coal and blowing on it till it flared up. Then he washed his hands and moved to the table to eat his cereal while Gram fried his bacon and tomatoes over the gas ring inside one of the panels of the wall stove. As she worked, Gram held a conversation with Joey Budge.

"His second day in England and he's found himself a job, Joey. What dosta say to that?"

"Now then, now then!" croaked Joey, and he began to swear. Gram shook her big spoon at him.

"None of that now! We'll have no more of thy hanky-panky!"

When Gram was not looking his way, Bill found himself studying her closely for the first time since he and Merrie had arrived. Her old-fashioned skirt, her blouse with its white ruffle, the shawl she wore over her shoulders,

fastened together by a brooch, her high, buttoned shoes—they were all as he had imagined when his mother had described her to him. He noticed her big earlobes poking out below her floppy cap, and the many tiny wrinkles of her cheeks. And he noticed that she moved quickly, sometimes with a gay little hop, like a young girl.

When breakfast was over, Gram found two candles and a box of matches.

"And now, love," she said, "off we go to the loft, before Merrie wakes up." She led the way through the wide square hallway, past the door to the big, empty room, and up the broad staircase Bill and Merrie had discovered the day before, to the landing and then into her own bedroom, a colourful place full of foreign dolls, carved jewel boxes, and miniature ships inside bottles. Along one wall was a row of stands, each holding a trailing plant, and in one corner was a fuzzy yellowish-brown cactus almost ceiling high. Gram chuckled when Bill went closer to examine it.

"That's our 'Teddy Bear Cactus,'" she said. "I don't know what we'll do with him if he grows much taller. He was only a few inches high when he came. Your father brought him to me, lad, when he was here during the war. He brought him in the plane, all the way from Arizona."

From behind the door, Gram lifted a long-handled hook and slipped it through a ring in a ceiling panel. Taking the hook from her, Bill tugged till the panel moved down and a ladderlike stairway lowered to the floor. He climbed up, stopping inside the loft because it was too dark to see, and Gram, who came close behind him, lit the candles and handed one to him. Soon the shadowy forms lying on all sides became coils of rope, life preservers, sea chests, wooden trestles, and every kind of fishing tackle; and straight ahead under the eaves was the wood: planks and pieces of every size and kind. With Gram at his side, Bill ran his hand along a beautiful mast, eighteen feet tall.

"You're welcome to use it if you like, lad," said Gram.

"Oh, Gram, it's wonderful! And the wood! There ought to be enough to build a boathouse for the *Fury* when I've finished her! I can build it opening on to the creek, so I can sail her right in at high tide!"

Gram brought her candle down close to Bill's on the loft floor.

"This mast was part of the *Puffin*, the first sailing boat your grandfather ever built, Bill. How that little boat flew before the wind!"

"Grandfather built sailing boats?" cried Bill. "I never knew! Mother never said anything about it, Gram. Why didn't she tell me?"

Gram stood up slowly, holding her candle.

"He—well, love, he was killed in a storm at sea, one of those sudden squalls we have hereabouts."

"In a sailing boat, Gram?" asked Bill breathlessly.

"Yes, lad. He went out to save a fishing boat being swept on to the rocks near the Head. There wasn't time for the lifeboat to get to them, you see. He and the three fishermen were lost." Gram stood very still, and there was no sound in the loft. But soon she moved away, calling to Bill brightly.

"Come over here, lad. We've everything from rowlocks to spurs in these kegs here. You're welcome to use anything you like. Have a good look round. I think I'd best go and see to the little mite, bless her. Here, I'll leave you my candle."

Bill helped Gram down the ladder, and returned to spend an hour exploring the loft. When he had examined everything, he blew out the candles, shouldered two of the wooden trestles, and carried them downstairs, through the kitchen, where Mennie was having her breakfast, and out to the wreck. Then slowly, straining every muscle, he lifted the boat upside-down on to the trestles, first the bow, then the stern. He was feverish to begin work. He would

have to go to the station in Bridlington for his toolbox, but there was a saw in the loft, and he had found a few packages of sandpaper; and he had his two-foot ruler in the pocket of his travelling jacket. He raced upstairs to his room and down again, opening his ruler on the way, preparing to measure the length of the damaged planks. He hurried to the loft for the three soundest and straightest spruce boards he could find, carried them one by one downstairs, and began the measuring and sawing. Next he would wrap the planks in cloth dipped in boiling water, to bend them to the *Fury's* shape. He would overlap the boards carefully, and use the galvanized wire nails and the liquid marine glue he had brought over in his toolbox. Everything from anchor to cleats must be perfect. His head sang with thoughts of sails to be bought with the money he would earn, and rigging, and the two coats of copper paint he would give to her planking, and the two of white lead he would give to her topsides, before he began the decorating.

When he had finished cutting the new planking, he lifted the boat down to the sand, righted her and began to strip her, unscrewing broken fittings and cutting away tangled rigging. If he would ask Gram where he could borrow a blowlamp, he told himself, so he could burn off every bit of paint before repainting.

He worked steadily for two hours, never looking away from the boat, stopping only to admire her lovely, sweeping, curving lines. Sometimes clouds passed over the little bay, sending their shadows across the water beneath them. Sometimes a shadow would touch the derelict. But it was never the shadow that Bill saw. It was the sunny patch that followed, that stole into the terrace to rest for a moment like a spotlight, exactly on the *Fury*.

Bill had climbed into the cockpit to begin to pull loose the broken boards of the cabin when he heard his sister's voice and looked over the boat's side towards the ravine.

Merrie and Gram were coming quickly towards him, Merrie holding Gram's arm under the long grey cape. Behind them came two men in white hospital uniforms, carrying a stretcher. Bill stood up, shivering suddenly, with the sea wind blowing his hair. He understood right away what the procession meant. Gram was having Tim's mother brought to *Dyke House* in order to take care of her. Tim was coming, too, holding a basket the two kittens would be inside. Tim's shoulders stooped as he walked, and he looked shy and scared, but he gazed at Bill and the boat as he drew near, with eyes burning in eagerness.

"Hello, there," he said in a tiny, pinched voice when he was a few feet away. Bill looked down into the boy's pale face, and at the triangular white bandage strapping one arm tight against his chest.

"Hi." Bill nodded, blushing in confusion, turning quickly away. The procession rounded *Dyke House* to the kitchen door, leaving Bill alone with the broken cabin boards in his hands. He stared around him, and all the light that had been darting down to bathe the *Fury* seemed to have gone out.

## Chapter 11

### REBUILDING THE *FURY*

BILL left the boat and followed the stretcher into *Dyke House*, expecting at every moment that Tim would turn on him and accuse him as Rolf had done, or that Tim's mother would tell him she was disappointed in him. He was glad that Gram kept him busy bringing the wooden bedstead from the loft and clean sheets and blankets from the airing cupboard, and building up the fire till it sent its glow into every corner of the kitchen. He was glad of anything that meant moving about, without talking or having to answer questions. He was even glad when Gram said:

"Would you show Tim upstairs, lad? I thought he could sleep in the extra bed in your room, if that's all right with you." He hurried upstairs, balancing Tim's suitcase on his shoulder. He whistled to cover up his embarrassment at hearing Tim climbing after him, stumbling and groping in the darkness.

While Tim watched from the doorway, Bill emptied his clothes from the chest of drawers and stacked them in piles inside the old sea chest at the foot of his bed.

"There now." He left the three chest drawers half open and started to leave the room. "If you need more space, there's an empty drawer in the little table," he said.

"Thank you." Tim walked past him into the room and knelt on his suitcase, struggling with his good arm to release the catches. Bill saw that his face was white and drawn, and there was perspiration on his forehead. He

went back and crouched close to the narrow shoulders in the shabby jacket that was too large.

"I'll just give you a hand with this," he mumbled. He opened the suitcase and arranged Tim's shirts and underwear and socks in the chest drawers, and next to him the thin boy lifted one or two things in a haphazard way, with trembling fingers. When Bill closed the suitcase, Tim sat down on the edge of the bed which was to be his, breathing hard as if he had run up a long hill. Bill handed him a blanket from his own bed.

"You lie down and have a rest. I'll go ask Gram about sheets for your bed." Bill went downstairs with lagging steps, remembering Tim's pinched face and dark-rimmed eyes, and knowing that the broken arm was giving him pain.

When the ambulance men had left and Tim's mother was tucked into bed against the inner wall of the kitchen, she did not seem the wan person Bill had thought her on first seeing her. She was small and dark-haired, with fine, delicate features and large eyes like Tim's. It was only that her illness made her look old, as old as Gram. She had a quick smile, and as she chatted with Gram, her cheeks grew rosy with pleasure. Surely she knew by now who had hurt her son, and yet no shadow came over her face when she caught Bill's eye.

Tim came down to the kitchen when he had rested. He came on tiptoe from the hallway, and stood by his mother's bed, shyly watching Merrie play with Tumbles and the two kittens from the caravan house. Bill noticed that the boy had brought his cap downstairs with him, that he held it against his chest with his good arm, and twisted it and plucked at it, as if he did not know whether to stay or go out. But Merrie and the kittens romped so gaily that Tim moved closer to watch. Soon he forgot himself and burst out:

"Look at their mouths! They're all laughing, with their



mouths wide open! Look at your Tumbles! Eh, they're right pleased to be together again!" The words came in a rush, leaving Tim out of breath. He seemed much younger than Rolf or Pete now. The flickering firelight gave his face an elfish look, and he laughed openly and merrily. There was no sign of reproach or self-pity in his face.

It was because of Tim's friendliness, because of the way in which he kept addressing his remarks to Bill and smiling that Bill said to him, after dinner was over and the dishes washed:

"I'm going out to sand the planks for the boat now. Come along and watch if you want to." Only Tim's shining eyes answered, but in a moment he had put on the leather jacket and the worn brown muffler he had left hanging on the kitchen door. His step was light and quick as he followed Bill across the terrace.

With new zest, Bill lifted the first of the planks on to the terrace and straddled it, sitting on it as he sanded with firm strokes, while before him, Tim picked up a piece of sandpaper and worked with his left hand, stopping often to rest. Bill talked about the boat, about seeing her and running to her and dragging her in, about how the rebuilding would be different from rebuilding *Ginger* back at home. And as he talked, Tim bent towards him eagerly, measuring every word. Often he nodded his agreement, or smiled his approval. Tim was not blaming him for the injury to his arm, Bill told himself wonderingly. Tim was the very one to blame him most, and it seemed as if he did not know what it was to bear a grudge. Bill found himself saying hesitatingly:

"I'm awfully sorry about your arm, Tim. I guess I was so desperate I didn't stop to think. I just hit out. I'll see your mother gets some of my earnings from the job, to help out till you're better again."

"Oh, no!" Tim got to his feet and pressed his hand

against his cheek. "Mother and I wouldn't hear of taking any money from you! It was all an accident, and—and . . ." He gulped and went on breathlessly, "I believe you about getting to the boat first, even if Rolf and Pete don't. We hadn't any right to try to take her away from you!"

The two boys worked for a while in silence, closer together now. Then they began to talk about the *Fury*, about the jobs it was most important to do first so that she would be protected through the winter. When Bill looked at his watch, it was almost time for him to be at North Landing to help bring in the *New Hope*. He jumped up and stood tall against the sky, smiling down at Tim.

"Keep an eye on her for me. Don't work any longer. You're not fit to work yet. I'll give you plenty to do when your arm's better. And look, tell Gram I'll be late, will you? I'm going to Bridlington for my toolbox after I've finished work. We can't get much further without the nails and screws and things like that. So long, Tim."

Bill raced away across Gram's garden, stopping once to wave and let his eyes rest on the *Fury* before he hurried on. Two hours later, after working for Mr. Marvell so quickly and steadily that several of the fishermen at North Landing remarked about it, Bill caught a bus to Bridlington, then a second one back, with his toolbox propped between his knees. Weary and hungry, he plodded down the Danes Dyke lane, continually shifting the long, thin box on his back so that the rope round it would not cut into his shoulders. His white boots had begun to chafe his feet in spite of the heavy socks he was wearing, and the bumps and sores he had got on his legs and arms when he was salvaging the *Fury* the day before ached and smarted.

The sun was setting when he turned into the ravine, down between the high cliffs which cut off half the sky. Before him as he emerged from the shadows of the trees, he saw breakers beyond *Dyke House* hurling themselves

against the cliffs, and above them the sky was a fierce blood red, with rolling purple clouds edged by all the colours of the rainbow. On the windy open stretch of the terrace, he could see Tim—he recognized him from his bandage—and inside the *Fury* were two other, taller figures. He knew right away that they were Rolf and Pete. That they had come did not surprise him. What did surprise him was that they were hard at work. Boards were lifting and flying over the edge of the derelict as they tore them loose.

Bill broke into a run, his heart pounding in anger and alarm. He did not shout, and he had nearly reached the boat when Pete saw him and said to Rolf:

"Eh, lad, mind yourself, here comes t'Big Chief!"

As Bill rushed up, setting down the toolbox and clutching the side of the boat with both fists, Pete propped himself against a gunwale and chewed a straw, grinning but saying nothing. Bill flung out:

"What do you two think you're doing with my boat? Get out before I throw you out!" Rolf stopped work and stood with his feet apart, leaning slightly against the curved side of the cockpit, and it was he who answered:

"No need to burst a blood vessel. We're just getting things moving a bit." He surveyed the *Fury* in a satisfied way, as if the little boat were a stage all set for a scene he had planned. "Aye," he continued, "we want to see t'cabin rebuilt before winter hits her. Winter won't do her any good as she is. We want to take good care of her, don't we, Pete, lad?"

"Right," Pete grinned, "but I'm for getting on back to t'village now, Rolf. We've done enough for one day, and t'fish and chip shop opened half an hour since." Pete jumped with a heavy thud into the sand and stood swinging his arms and puffing out his cheeks in the cool wind from the sea.

Bill pulled himself up over the side of the *Fury*. He was surprised when Rolf jumped out an instant later, stretching

his arms and stamping his legs to drive the stiffness away after crouching inside the cabin. But Bill's surprise turned to hot anger again when Rolf called to Tim:

"Come along with us a bit, Tim. We've something important to say to you." Tim frowned unhappily, staring at Bill, and standing stock-still for a full minute before he jumped down from the terrace and followed his two friends into the ravine.

Bill picked up his toolbox and went indoors, where Gram was making a warm supper. He placed the toolbox by the door leading to the hall, nodded to Tim's mother, washed at the sink and sat down at his sister's side at the table. He listened to stories about the kittens and even laughed with McRie and tickled her ribs; but part of him was alert to sounds from outside, waiting for Tim's step, or Rolf's or Pete's. He was afraid for the boat. He knew now that she would never be safe. At any time the boys might steal her, dragging her around the cliffs of Flamborough Head, or even paddling or towing her in deeper water. Bill's anxiety took his appetite away, and soon he excused himself and hurried outside to the *Fury*, straight down to her to spread Gram's tarpaulin over her and stand by her in the growing darkness.

Tim returned as Bill waited there. He came up quietly, with his good hand thrust into his torn jacket pocket.

"Can I do anything to help?" he asked in a shy, halting voice. Bill whirled around to face him, glowering his distrust. But instead of answering, he shrugged and walked to the other side of the boat. He waited impatiently for Tim to go away, and realized with a sensation of disgust that the thin boy was moving nearer, leaning against the terrace wall, letting his head droop on his chest.

"I—I didn't know what to do," came Tim's hopeless stammer. "Rolf and Pete—well, you see, they're my friends . . . I—I didn't really want to . . ." But he did not go on. With his back against the wall, he waited for

some sign from Bill, and when none came, he sniffed, ran his sleeve over his face and climbed on to the terrace, where the wind struck him in the face so he had to walk hunched forward towards the kitchen door.

Bill stayed as he was, one arm flung out over the *Fury*. The trees in the ravine to his left seemed to draw nearer as night came. Soon there was no light between them; they shut like a thick black door. There was still some light high in the sky. He could see a flock of wild ducks flying, and the lonely rocks with the waves licking at them hungrily. But then an inky blackness spread over the sky. The colours left the shore and there was only the glow from the kitchen lamps to light the boat and the frothing creek behind her. And the cold, frosty sea seemed to rise up about Bill, and cry at him reproachfully. He wanted to forget everything and go to bed, but he knew that when he went to his room, Tim would be there in the extra bed against the inner wall, not sleeping but watching him with that curious, fixed, frightened look of his. It was hateful to think of sleeping in the same room with Tim now. "That kid," Bill called him in his thoughts, "that scared, two-faced, little kid." And he muttered out loud:

"See if I ever ask Tim Prudem again to help with the rebuilding!"

## Chapter 12

### BILL MAKES A MISTAKE

**B**ILL had been working for Mr. Marvell a week when the chance came to go to sea in the *New Hope*. Carrying a basket of bait down the slipway before dawn one bleak morning, Bill heard Old Bob say:

"Nay, John, I shan't go home. Nay, I'll not leave thee, with George away and all. Tha cannot put to sea alone, and I won't see thee lose a whole day's catch."

"But I shan't be alone, Bob," said Mr. Marvell. "I shall take t'lads along. It's a good chance to see if yon new lad's a right fisherman like his grandfather. Now go along home to bed. I'll not have thee out on t'water, and thee so poorly tha's hardly able to stand. There's no cause to fret. We'll manage champion."

But Old Bob did not leave North Landing till the fleet put to sea. He waited dejectedly, and though Bill could hardly see him in the darkness, he could hear him higher on the beach, walking back and forth, crushing the pebbled sand under his boots. The old man moved closer when Mr. Marvell, Bill, Rolf and Pete pushed the coble into the waves, waded out and climbed aboard. As Bill leaned over the stern, fitting the rudder into place, Old Bob's husky voice carried to the *New Hope* over the water.

"Ah, well, John, I'm hoping tha'll have a good catch today, with t'lucky charm tha has aboard." Bill wondered at the old man's words as he heard him plodding towards the slipway, and as he listened to the dip of oars and the hanging of gear in the other boats near by. The coble reached the entrance of the bay and Rolf held her steady

with the oars while Mr. Marvell started her motor. On every side, motors were chuffing into life, some smoothly, some with an uncertain coughing, and now Bill could see the ruffled white of the other boats' wakes as their crews steered them swiftly to sea. It was not until the *New Hope* had left the landing that Mr. Marvell said:

"I'm right glad tha'rt wearing t'white boots, lad. T'old fishermen, like Bob there, they always used to say those white boots brought luck to thy grandfather's boat. And it was strange. He didn't have them on when he put to sea and lost his life." There was a silence before Mr. Marvell finished, "Aye, we'll go along out there and see if t'white boots are still lucky."

Tingles of excitement ran through Bill as the *New Hope* passed the cliff caves where, a century before, pirates had hidden treasures captured from trading ships. He moved to the coble's bow, climbing over coils of rope still wet from the day before, and steadied himself when the boat struck the rough currents off Flamborough Head. He had no fear of being sick. He had spent too many hours in canoes and rowing boats and sailing boats in America to have any misgivings about that. He felt easy and at home in the coble. The life belts hanging from the gunwales, the furled sail for use if the motor failed, the fire extinguisher, the distress rockets, the baskets of cod he had helped to chop the evening before to bait the crab pots, all seemed familiar to him, as if he had been brought up in a fisherman's family, had gone away, and now was taking up his old life again.

The wind changed, bringing the smell of fish from the baskets and the boat's planking to him, but there was no glimmer from the sun, and the sky was grey and heavy-looking. When the *New Hope* had chugged eight miles to sea, the other boats were far to port and leeward, and the coast was only a chalk line with clouds sweeping up from it, Rolf sighted the cork buoy with its little flag that

marked the end of Mr. Marvell's first fleet of pots. Steering towards the flag, Mr. Marvell reduced the coble's speed and started the hauler, the machine that was to draw the pots up from the sea bottom. Soon Bill was lifting the pots into the boat, wrenching at them to drag them over the side, while Rolf and Peter pulled the crabs and lobsters from them and dropped them into empty baskets. The pots, built of hoops of ash and blackthorn gathered from the woods near Humberborough, were heavy with their weights of scrap iron. But Bill braced himself against the boat's planking and worked without pause, though his hands grew red and swollen with cold.

More than an hour passed, and the sea was rising, with a strong wind coming up from the east, when Mr. Marvell shouted to Bill

"Hold on a minute, Dad. Looks like we've a most uncommon haul of lobsters. I'll get a few claws tied before they chew one another to bits. Eh, and it's time for a rest. Tha'rt new in t'work. Tha'll kill thyself going on at that pace. Look here, I'll show thee how t'ying's done."

Bill straightened his back and watched as Mr. Marvell, crouching in the bottom of the boat, gripped a thrashing lobster between his knees. The lobster jabbed its great claws over its back, trying to tear Mr. Marvell's hands, but calmly and quickly, Mr. Marvell cut a piece of string with his pocket knife and tied first one claw, then the other.

"It's so quick!" Bill exclaimed. "I thought lobsters were too clumsy to snap like that!"

"Eh, they're wily old fighters all right. They'd snap off a thumb-end quick as scat if tha didn't mind." Mr. Marvell chuckled as his strong, hard fingers brought a second lobster from its basket and thrust it between his knees.

"I don't think our American friend would like that job, Dad," said Rolf from behind Bill where he was resting with one leg up on the stern thwart. Before Bill could reply, Mr. Marvell ordered:



"All right now, get back to work, all of ye, and mind ye don't step too close to t'hauler. We've some twenty pots in this fleet to empty, and four more fleets after this lot."

Bill went on lifting pots over the side and releasing them again, with trickles of sweat rolling down his back and drying in the chill wind. When the fifty pots of the first claim had been emptied and rebaited, and the *New Hope* was moving towards the second fleet of pots, Mr. Marvell said:

"Tha must take t'second lot, Rolf, and give t'lad a rest. Here, Bill, I'll show thee how to keep an eye on t'hauler. Tha mustn't go too near it, mind, and watch that t'rope doesn't foul."

It was when the second fleet of pots was half emptied and rebaited that Bill saw something breaking the surface to leeward, a triangle which grew till it was like a shining black sail. There was a surging in the sea as a second triangle rose quickly behind it, and a huge, shadowy shape moved towards the coble. Bill shouted:

"Look there, Mr. Marvell! What is it?" The big fisherman followed Bill's finger with his eyes.

"It's a shark, lad. It's what we call a basking shark." The great fish moved diagonally across the *New Hope's* stern.

"Why, it must be thirty feet long!" cried Bill. "It's as big as the boat!"

"Aye, lad. That one will weigh five thousand pounds, I'll be bound. But look tha . . ." Mr. Marvell ran forward, his hands out before him. The rope from the crab pot hanging tight against the coble was slipping from its groove in the hauler. Bill lunged for the rope, to thrust it back into place. There was a sudden jerk, the crab pot fell inside the boat, and he felt a sharp pain as the rope burned through his hand and began to wind itself around the hauler's spindle.

"T'oon t'lever! Turn t'lever!" cried Mr. Marvell and

Rolf in unison. Bill clutched at the hauler handle, but it was too late. There was a grinding, straining noise, the whole boat tipped to one side, and Bill fell sideways against the middle thwart. He scrambled up as Mr. Marvell leaped past him to turn off the coble's motor, and he heard the big fisherman mutter:

"It's t'propeller. T'rope's got fast in t'propeller."

The *New Hope* straightened herself, but Mr. Marvell stood stroking his chin and shaking his head, marking the direction the rope took away from the hauler. Bill faced him, his eyes telling his shame.

"Eh, never mind, lad. We'll have a look at t'propeller. Like as not she's as right as rain," said Mr. Marvell. He moved away from Bill to the glass panel at the stern of the boat, over the propeller shafts. Bill, Rolf and Pete shifted the coils of rope and the baskets and pots fore so the coble rode with her stern out of the water. Then they watched silently while Mr. Marvell pried up the glass panel with his knife and cut the rope loose.

"Aye . . ." he said slowly. "Ah, well, I was afraid it might be like that." Bill heard the disappointment in the fisherman's voice. "Well, that's that for today. It's bent t'blades. We can't go very far without t'propeller."

Bill blurted out, "Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I'm terribly sorry. I—I never thought . . ." But Rolf flared up, interrupting him.

"It's all right for you. You don't depend on crabbing for your living. It's all t'same to you if we get a thousand or none!"

"I—I'm sorry. I wasn't paying attention. I didn't think. I . . ." Bill murmured, reddening. He caught sight of Pete, perched at the stern, watching with an uneasy grin on his face. It was Rolf who went on talking excitedly.

"And you'd best take those white boots off. You don't deserve to wear them. You've broken t'propeller and it'll be days before Dad can fix it!"

"Nay, lad, nay, it mightn't be even a day. We've a spare propeller at home in t'shed. It's only a matter of unscrewing t'old one and fitting t'new one on. Don't be so hasty. It was an accident. T'lad's sorry."

"He's not sorry enough! He's not sorry he broke Tim's arm! He's over there at Danes Dyke working on that boat, our boat! We've watched him this last week, just singing and whistling away. Nay, Dad, he's not sorry about anything! I won't work with him! I won't work another day with him!"

"If ye can't get on without forever fighting and fratching, ye can all take a holiday," said Mr. Marvell grimly. "George and Bob and I can get on without ye. I don't like a lot of hard words around t'place." Mr. Marvell turned his attention to the hauler, and directed the boys without looking at them:

"Hold t'rope, all three of ye. Now slacken it on both sides while I get this muddle cleared up. And we'll hear no more about it. Ye can all stay at home till school starts."

Bill pulled on the rope, yanking at the crab pot inside the coble so Mr. Marvell could loosen the tangle around the hauler. His right hand was raw and bleeding where the rope had cut it, but he used it as quickly and roughly as his left one, blaming and hating himself as he worked. When the tangle was freed, Mr. Marvell tied the rope where he had cut it, and dropped it over the boat's stern. Then Bill and Rolf helped him pull the mast from its place under the thwarts and step it, putting a basket on top as a signal to the other fishing boats that the *New Hope* needed a tow. When ten minutes had gone by and no boat had appeared, Mr. Marvell rigged the sail, came about and started slowly, in an unsteady wind, towards North Landing.

Bill sat bent forward, his back towards the other boys. He gazed unhappily at the scarred face of Flamborough Head in the distance, at the gulls and kittiwakes crying

against the waves, at a school of porpoises coming up to port, rising and diving in a row. He leaned against a gunwale and let his right hand hang out in the water. At first the cut across his palm smarted and stung, but soon the rush of salt water against it numbed the pain.

The time passed slowly. The little boat had to fight for every foot she progressed, one moment hanging suspended on a wave crest, the next plunging down into a trough, dipping drunkenly. It took four hours in the harsh, damp wind to cover the eight miles to the shore, and when finally North Landing lay ahead, and Mr. Marvell furled the mainsail and dropped anchor because the wind was too strong to sail in past the rocks, all Bill's hurt and shame came back. He jumped up more quickly than the other boys when the big fisherman began to give orders in his businesslike way.

"Rolf and Pete, take t'ous and keep her prow steady. Bill, hold on to t'anchor rope. Get ready to haul it up. There's Arthur Marshall's boat coming now. I'll signal for a tow."

After having been drawn past the rocks by Marshall's boat and released in the safety of the bay, the *New Hope* moved to the shore, with Bill standing in the midships, rowing with deep, strong strokes. When she touched the beach, Bill jumped down and ran up the slipway for the skids, bringing them down two at a time, while Mr. Marvell, Rolf and Pete drew the cable to the water's edge. There was no need to go for the donkeys. The empty baskets could be left in the boat, and there were only five full baskets to carry, three of lobsters and two of crabs. The boys took them up the hill and loaded them on to the lorry. As Mr. Marvell climbed to the cab, Bill, looking at the ground, said:

"I'm sorry it hasn't worked out better. I wanted it to work out. I'm sorry I made such a mess of everything today." Bill liked Mr. Marvell. He'd grown to admire

him as much as he had ever admired anybody, even his own father and the Professor.

"Th, lad, don't trouble thyself so," said the big man kindly, looking down from the cab. "Tha's had a spot of hard luck, that's all. I'll have a talk with Roll in a day or two. We'll work something out for t' afternoons when school's begun. Tha mustn't worry about it."

"Well—thanks, sir," breathed Bill, and without raising his eyes, he walked in slow, tired stride, with his hands hanging at his sides, down the road.

He quickened his steps as he neared the village. Every time he walked down the high street now he was full of furtive looks, of raised eyebrows, of conversations broken off as he approached, of shrugging shoulders and hands secretly gesturing. Today he turned right on the road leading obliquely away towards Dancer Dyke. It was the longer way home, but the lonelier way, the way which avoided the post-office corner and the village green.

When he reached the Dyke, he plunged eagerly down into the ravine, into the dark tunnels under the trees. He sensed that someone was there, close by, moving quietly among the rods and twigs of the brush—he felt that someone was stealthily watching him. He had heard the crackling of brush on other days, too loud, he knew, to be the carrying of small animals. On other days, the sounds had filled him with foreboding. Looking over his shoulder, he had hurried on, anxious about the *Idi*. But today he did not care. He walked slowly through the undergrowth that swiped at his arms and legs and out into the clearing, through the shadows of cliffs that were like great animals ready to spring, like lions with paws extended.

He did not examine the boat as he had done every other day in the past week, to make sure no one had been tampering with her in his absence; he did not look for footprints coming and going from her, toe-treading on heel-mark—and patterned differently from the marks his own

boots would make. He did not even look for Tim who was so often standing near the *Fury* in a suspicious way. Instead he pulled off the white boots and stuffed them inside the damaged cabin. Then he climbed to the terrace and sat hugging his knees and staring, his mouth tight-pressed, out over the sea.

## Chapter 13

### THE STORM

A storm began the afternoon of the day Bill lost his job, and heightened till a curtain of hail made it impossible to see the cliffs from Gram's kitchen windows. Huge white hailstones smacked the leaded panes, and moths fluttered against the mullions, trying to beat their way in to safety. From her bed, Tim's mother kept moving her eyes from the windows to the door, waiting for Tim to come back. He had left after dinner to work on some project of his at the caravan house. He had often been away for afternoons during the week he and his mother had been living at *Dyke House*, and at first no one felt anxiety about his absence. But when tea time came, and still the storm rose, Bill offered to go up on to the cliff to find him. Tim's mother waved her hand in protest.

"Nay, lad, it'll be right wild back there in t'ravine where t'creek narrows. Like as not there'll be trees falling. It wouldn't be safe for you climbing t'ravine path. Tim will be all right. No doubt he's decided to stay at home till t'morning. He'll find himself something to eat. There's a tin of soup, and some biscuits in t'biscuit barrel. You've enough to do making sure t'boat is safe."

By midnight, when the wind and rain had become twin demons hurling themselves at *Dyke House*, Bill lay with his head in the corner of Gram's rocking chair, fast asleep; and Tim's mother slept with her face turned to the wall. Only Gram was awake, glancing at the spluttering flame of the oil lamp hanging from the ceiling, uptoeing to the inner door to make sure Merrie was not crying, peeping

at Joey Budge and the canaries, restless in their cages. She placed a blanket over Bill's knees and moved to the window to watch the waves crashing against the storm wall.

Bill hadn't meant to fall asleep. The water of the creek had flooded in till it lapped around the bases of the trestles supporting the *Fury*. He had brought the trestles indoors, and tied up the boat. He had tied her as securely as he could, with every bit of rope he and Gram could find in the house, even the length of cord the porter had brought him for his toolbox at Southampton. It took many yards of rope to tie the *Fury* to the corner pillar of the kitchen porch, and the only mooring he could find for the boat's stern was the hook embedded in the side of the house, which Gram used for hanging out her washing line. He was worried that the force of the wind and waves would tear the hook out of the wall and had been going out every ten or fifteen minutes, dressed in his boots and the macintosh and sou'wester that had been his grandfather's, to make sure the ropes were holding. The last time he had returned to the kitchen, he had picked up a book and forced himself to read to keep his eyes open. Gram had watched the book slip from his hands, and had caught it before it could fall to the floor. Now, with the tide high, she put on her grey cape and hurried to the kitchen door, leaning against it as she opened it, to keep it from slamming against the inner wall. She stepped over the doorstep, tugging at the door behind her, and when it was shut, she sank back against it with her head out of the wind, to catch her breath. Then she began to feel her way along the front wall of the house towards the recess which was Bill's place for the *Fury*.

Soon after Gram had gone out into the storm, Merric entered the kitchen. She had not put on her dressing gown or slippers, and her fingers were icy when she touched Bill's forehead.



"What is it, what's the matter?" Bill jumped up from his chair.

"I had a bad dream," whispered Merrie hoarsely. "It's raining awfully hard, Bill. It's scary."

Bill thought of the boat. He rushed past Merrie to the window and wiped a pane clear with his sleeve. The waves were splashing over the top of the storm wall now, and fanning out over the terrace. He put on his boots and rain clothes and ran to the door, with Merrie close behind him.

"Bill, oh, please, Bill, don't go out. Stay with me," she begged.

"I'll be right back. You wait by the fire, and be quiet. Tim's mother is asleep," Bill whispered sternly. He did not look at his sister, but pulling the door shut behind him, he heard her whimper, "Gram . . . Where's Gram?"

As Bill raced across the terrace, spray stung his face, and water swished over his feet, leaving its froth clinging to the sides of his boots. The tide was climbing higher than he had ever imagined it could climb, and the creek was running wild. Breakers were riding pell-mell into the building place : the *bury*. Rounding the house, Bill saw Gram, pressed against the terrace wall and knee-deep in swirling water. The *bury* was gone.

Bill threw himself down into the water at Gram's side.

"Gram!" He cried in an agony of dread. "Where's the boat?" He could hardly hear her answer above the storm.

"She was gone when I got here, lad. I've been back as far as I could go towards the ravine. There's no sign . . ." Gram slipped as a fresh wave came in, almost falling to her knees, and Bill thrust his hands under her arms. He lifted her to the wall, climbing up after her, helping her across the terrace and through the kitchen door. When he took her cape from her, she sank into her rocking chair, and Merrie, who had been clutching Tumbles and crying

silently before the fire, came to lay her head in Gram's lap.

"Are you all right, Gram? Will you be all right now?" Bill whispered, bending to study the old woman's face. "I'll go back if you're all right."

"I'm all right, but do be careful, lad!" Gram whispered. Bill ran across the room and out into the storm again.

He found the boat far up the creek. Her mooring ropes were gone and she was rolling from side to side as waves swept into her. He had to force his way through water waist-deep to reach her. He grasped her, climbed into her cockpit, and felt with his hands to make sure she had not been damaged further.

Then suddenly, mixed with the roar of the storm, the hum of voices came to him. He stood up, peering at the cliff top, searching for the place where the road led away from the sea. It was not from the cliff, but from the thrashing foliage behind him in the ravine that a light flashed and went out.

"Rolf and Pete! They've been trying to steal the *Fury*. They cut her loose and brought her back here. They thought they could get away with it in the storm," Bill told himself bitterly. "I wonder how they were going to get her up out of the hollow. Two couldn't carry her up that path. But there could be more than two of them. . ."

Bill kept stopping to watch and listen as he dragged the boat up the creek's bank and reached into her cabin for the bailing can to empty the water from her cockpit. All at once, lifting the can brimming with water, he saw that someone had come to the ridge of sand above him. He threw the can into the *Fury* and rushed towards the ridge, shouting at the top of his lungs:

"So you thought you'd steal my boat, did you? I'll show you!" When he was close enough to spring at the boy on the creek's bank, he saw a large, white, triangular bandage, and heard Tim's voice.

"I wasn't with those other lads."

"Try to make me believe that!" Bill towered over Tim, scowling down at him. "You were spying for them! You've been spying for them all along!"

"I was not spying! I've never spied! That's a lie!" Tim's eyes shone dark and wide, and his face was almost as white as his bandage. Bill went on, holding himself rigid in his anger.

"Say what you want, I won't believe you. I haven't been going around here with my eyes shut. I've seen you hanging around, watching me. You've been reporting everything to those other two!"

"All right then, if that's what you want to believe," said Tim through tense, thin lips. He turned away toward *Dyke House*, sloshing through the creek's flood, stumbling and slipping, keeping his eyes down and not looking back.

Bill returned at once to the *Fury* and began to bail. His anger made him work in a frenzy of haste, and within five minutes, only an inch of water was left in the cockpit and he was able to drag her up on to the ridge. He waited beside her, clinging with both hands to her prow as the wind shrieked around the corners of *Dyke House*, shrill and wild as witches' cries. He could see the waves in the bay. He could see their white crests marching in, an endless army, with every seventh or eighth crest towering higher than the rest, pounding over Gram's storm wall to spend itself across the terrace.

Even with the mackintosh and sou'wester to protect him, Bill's clothes grew sodden as he waited for the tide to go out, so he could take the boat back to the wall. He was standing in pools inside his boots, and icy rain trickled down his neck and down his back. But he stayed as he was, listening for sounds behind him in the ravine, wheeling around time and time again, searching for another flash of light among the trees or above him on the cliff.

He could not have said how long he stayed out in the

storm, with the sound of the sea running through and through him, as if he were holding a giant conch shell to his ears. It seemed to him that the lowering of the tide and the end of the gale happened both in an instant, that he awoke from a bad dream to find that the creek was sinking back to its channel and he could draw the *Fury* back to her old place. His legs aching in weariness, he pulled her along the creek, and dragged her inch by inch up the bank to the flat, hard-washed stretch of sand behind the terrace. Then he went indoors to the meal Gram had been keeping hot for him. He did not speak, except to say that the boat was all right, because Tim's mother was still sleeping, and Mornie had fallen asleep on the settee.

Gram's kitchen clock struck four while he was eating. In a few minutes he would have to leave for North Landing. No, he had forgotten. He had no job any more. He slumped down where he was, with his head on his arms. He would go up to bed soon, as Gram was urging him to do. But first he wanted to make sure again that his boat was safe, that Roll and Pete had not come back. He wandered like a sleepwalker out on to the terrace, and when he had gone down to the boat and passed his hands along her, and examined her once more, he walked along the edge of the creek, towards the sea. There was a fresh smell around him, that keen sea smell that comes after heavy rain. The waves were backing away, guigling over the pebbles, and the sky was clearing at the horizon, promising a lovely day. Yawning, stretching his arms, he turned back towards *Dyke House*.

It was Gram Bill saw first. She stood six feet above him on the terrace. She was holding her head to one side and drawing up her shoulders as she gazed at the shore beneath her, where the sand was gone as if a giant had scooped it up in great handfuls and thrown it into the sea, leaving only a mass of rounded, white stones.

Bill gave a start when he caught sight of the gaping

hole in the corner of the storm wall. He ran to Gram and lifted her down on to the stones, where she knelt to thrust her hand under the rough ledge that formed the very bottom of the wall's foundation. Crouching beside her, Bill peered into the chasm. He could see all the way under the terrace to the stone pillars that supported the house. As he looked, a gust of dank, chill air rushed into his face. He straightened himself, shivering, and turned questioningly to Gram. She was walking away from him, along the front of the wall. He followed her anxiously, wanting her to turn back and say something to reassure him. But Merrie came to the kitchen door, and Gram hurried away, along the creek and up on to the terrace at the lower place close to the *Fury*. Bill lingered, kicking at the jagged chunks of cement the storm had torn from the wall. A thought kept running through his head: what if another storm came, an even bigger storm? What would happen to *Dyke House* then?

"I could build a bulkhead around this corner," Bill told himself. "I could cut down a couple of trees back in the ravine, and use the heavier branches for piles. I could chop the ends into points and drive them down. But I might not be able to get them down very deep. It's all stones. There doesn't seem to be any sand or mud anywhere around here. At I maybe a wooden bulkhead wouldn't be strong enough. Maybe I should spend Professor's money on hiring somebody to reinforce the corner with concrete."

Bill went to the *Fury* and threw his arms over her deck. His mind felt cloudy; he was almost dizzy with tiredness, and his thoughts kept running together. It was as if there were two people arguing inside him.

"You have nothing but that wall to depend on," the first one said, and the second answered, "Well, it's not my job to see to it. I don't know anything about it. You'd think: was my house, and I've been here only a few days."

"But it is your house, yours and Gram's and Merrie's," the first one said. "It's the only home you have, and you know it's the most important place in the world to Gram."

Bill told himself he must decide right away what would be the best way to repair the wall. But what about the *Fury*? Anything he decided to do was going to take a lot of time and money, and how could he leave the *Fury* standing there half-finished as she was? With his hands in his trousers pockets, he walked to the back of *Dyke House*, past Gram's chrysanthemum beds, tousled and torn by the waves, through the back door and across the big empty room. He went upstairs to his own room, and after glancing at Tim to make sure he was asleep, he lit a candle and drew the word *Fury* on the piece of tin he found at the bottom of his toolbox. He drew in haste, like a person stealing time. As he worked, the sky grew lighter, and he moved to the window, closer to the clouds sailing like ragged schooners across the bay. Tomorrow he would try to find a few minutes to cut out the tin letters so they would be ready to fit into place when the hull was painted.

But Bill knew as he was drawing that he could never again have the joy of working undisturbed, hour after hour, on the boat. He would always have to think about the damaged wall now. The wall was his responsibility, all of this big old house was his responsibility, and the hole that was a danger to it would be there nagging at him until he got it repaired.

As he laid the strip of tin on his window sill, he saw that Gram had gone outside again, carrying an oil lamp. She moved under the wall, leaving the lamp on the stones. Then walking slowly to the high tide mark, she picked up a large white rock and carried it to the wall's broken corner. She bent out of sight for only an instant before she returned for a second rock.

Bill backed away from the window and blew out the candle, wondering if Gram had seen him watching. But

she had not noticed him. As she came toward the wall a second time, there was a look on her face he had never seen there before, a look of intense anxiety, almost of fear.

## *Chapter 14*

### FOREBODINGS

**T**HE morning after the storm, Bill rose with a single thought. He must talk to Gram about the wall, he must decide how to repair it. He dressed quickly, glancing at Tim who lay with his face in the sunlight streaming into the room. How thin and sallow how unlike the other Flamborough boys he was! He lay with his eyes tight shut but his eyelids twitched and soon he rolled over to face the wall. He was awake but afraid to stir. He did not look at Bill or even to look at him after what had happened on the ridge a few hours before.

When he had scrubbed his face and hands Bill stepped quietly past his sister's room and went downstairs to a kitchen gay with bird-song and laughter. It was as if everything were working together to try to make him forget the storm. Tim's aunt, a bit merry woman, had just arrived from the south of England to take Tim and his mother back to the caravan house and care for them. In her jolly way the aunt had taken charge already. She bustled back and forth, still in her blue-velvet hat, carrying basins of hot water and combing and brushing Mr. Prudem's hair. Gram, who was bringing the breakfast dishes to the small table by the bed, chuckled and winked at Bill. Had she forgotten about the damaged wall?

Moving to his place at the table, Bill listened half-heartedly as the women chatted over their cups of tea and plates of bread and butter and jam. When Tim came into the kitchen a few minutes after Bill, he greeted his aunt with a surprised smile, and began to ask her about his



journey; but he looked ill, and he had circles under his eyes, as if he had not slept. He sat down opposite Bill at the table, and while Gram prepared his bacon and tomatoes, he played with his knife and fork restlessly, and turned his cup round and round on its saucer. He answered shyly and softly when his aunt addressed him, and all the while he kept his attention on his plate, and was careful to avoid Bill's eye.

It was not till after ten o'clock, when Tim had gone out, that Bill saw his first chance to speak to Gram alone. She crossed the room carrying a breakfast tray for Merrie, and he followed her into the hall.

"I'll take that upstairs for you, Gram," he said. Then, lowering his voice, "I've been thinking we ought to have a talk about the wall." Gram smiled at him as she handed him the tray.

"It's good of you to take an interest in it, lad," she said. "I don't like to bother you with it when you're so busy working on the boat."

"But it's important, Gram."

"Yes, it is, lad," she said, and the anxious expression he had seen last night flitted across her face. He knew now she had been playing a part in the kitchen; she had never stopped worrying about the damage since she had discovered it.

She turned her frank eyes up to his face.

"I don't see how it would be possible for us to live anywhere else, you see, lad. There just aren't any empty houses hereabouts. There's the Robertson family living in a caravan all year long because there's nowhere else for them. And it's not just that, as you know. This is—well, it's home. I think you'll grow to love the old place as much as I do," Gram continued, more to herself than to Bill. "But I must get that wall reinforced somehow. I can't have you and Merrie staying here in any danger. It's going to cost a lot of money, I'm afraid, and I haven't

much besides my old-age pension. But we must do what we can."

Gram had reached the door to Merrie's room. She turned to lay her hand comfortingly on Bill's arm.

"I'll think some more about what we can do, lad, and then we'll have another talk about it," she said. "We mustn't speak about it in front of Merrie."

Gram tiptoed in to draw Merrie's curtains and gaze down into two twinkling, wide-awake blue eyes, and soon Merrie was sitting up eating her breakfast, with Gram and Bill beside her in a warm pool of sunshine from the window. The three kittens came walking into the room in a row, and Bill and Gram, busy trying to keep them from climbing onto Merrie's bed, did not hear Tim race upstairs. Then turned in surprise at the thin boy's high, excited shout:

"Oh, hurry down, Mrs. Wade! There are such a lot of people coming! There's a long line of them stretching right back into the ravine!"

Chuckling, Gram led the way downstairs and out on to the terrace, out into the glorious morning of leaping waves and clear blue sky that made the whole bay seem to be laughing aloud. Bill shaded his eyes and picked out the ones he knew—Mr. and Mrs. Marvell and George, Old Bob, Tom Junny, the cox'n of the Hamborough lifeboat, Robert Marsden, who worked the winch at North Landing, the young woman from the shop where Gram bought the weekly rations of fats and bacon and sugar. And there were many more. They came forward in two's and three's, along the mud path through the tumbled grass and bracken and thistles, and when they reached the edges of Gram's ruined garden, they began to sing, "Happy Birthday." Gram hurried to the edge of the terrace to greet them, and soon Bill was swept into the crowd with her, and drawn back across the terrace and through the kitchen door.

"Aye, lad," said Mr. Marvell, "tha'll have to get used

to this sort of thing happening once a year. It's t'only chance we have of showing thy grandmother what we think about her!" He turned to the crowd, and holding up a handful of envelopes, said:

"Now then, who else has some birthday cards from t'post office?" The people helped Gram into her rocking chair, and showered her with cards. Merrie came running, carrying her shoes and socks, with her hair uncombed and her dress wrinkled from having been thrown on so quickly. She drew her hands through her curls, shouting with pleasure, and Tim's mother called from her bed:

"There'll be one from every soul in t'village, I'll be bound!"

Watching from the edge of the crowd, Bill heard Mr. Marvell say to him above the noise:

"Now then, what have I done with that important-looking letter for thee, lad? I put it somewhere special, separate from t'rest. Ah, here it is. London postmark, and a seal on t'back and all." Mr. Marvell handed Bill a large tau envelope. Bill thanked him, but his heart sank. Clutching the letter, he moved to the hall door. Over his shoulder he saw Gram smiling and nodding, with her fingers darting so quickly as she opened her cards that his eyes could hardly follow heir movements. He heard someone whisper:

"Who would imagine she's seventy-eight years old to-day!" And as he stole away, out into the hall and up the stairs, he heard Gram's voice, rich and merry, and with a tremor of excitement in it:

"And now please sit down, everybody. Find a place. There's the settle and the window seat, and quite a few chairs. We'll have a nice cup of tea. I've the kettle on the hob, and I baked one or two extra buns this week, thinking there just might be someone dropping in. Make yourselves comfortable, everyone. I've Bill and Merrie and Tim to help with the handing round."

Bill fled upstairs to his room. He sat on the edge of his bed for several minutes before he opened the letter. He knew it was about the *Fury*, and he was not surprised to read:

*Dear Mr. Walton:*

*I returned today from the Continent to find a letter from my friend in Bridlington with the news that my sailing yacht has broken loose from her moorings. My friend has enclosed the advertisement which you placed in the Bridlington paper, saying you found a boat wrecked near Flamborough Head. From your description, I think that it is beyond doubt my boat. You ask the owner to state the name of the boat lost. My boat was called the Fury.*

*I shall write to my friend in Bridlington and ask him to come to see you, bringing the papers proving my ownership, and offering to sell the boat to you. If the damage is as you say, he will offer it to you for one-third its purchase price. I paid £50 for it eight years ago.*

*Yours truly,*

*D. H. Travers*

Bill reached in his pocket for his pencil and began to write hurriedly on the back of the envelope, directing himself under his breath:

‘Two dollars and eighty cents to the pound. One-third of fifty is sixteen and two-thirds. Sixteen and two-thirds times two and four-fifths . . .’ Two minutes later, Bill wrote down the sum, “£17 5s.” Then he laid his forehead against the window sill and asked himself again and again what he should do. He knew that the Professor would not mind his using almost half of the hundred dollars for a boat; but what about the hole in the sea wall? Surely he ought to use the money to repair that.

Gradually Bill grew aware that below him on the terrace some of the guests were talking about last night’s storm.

"I'll warrant we'll find we've lost some crab pots when we go out tomorrow. I shan't be surprised to find I've lost half a hundred," one of the fishermen said. "But it'll not be as serious as what's happened to this wall." Bill moved his ear closer to the edge of the sill and heard Mr. Marvell say:

"I don't like to think of them staying here through t'winter and all. Picture what'll happen if there's a big blow from t'southeast. And I don't think a penny under two hundred pounds would do t'job, not t'way it needs doing, and prices going like they're going these days. It needs a strong stone wall, like t'one at Budlington. Not so big, of course, but six feet down under t'shore and at least eight feet above."

"I shouldn't choose living down here," said another fisherman. "Give me t'village. It's warmer, for one thing, and when I'm on t'sea all day, well, I like to see t'back of it come evening. But dosta remember Billy White Boots? He was fair smitten on this spot, and Liza's t'same."

"And Billy's father and grandfather were t'same before him," put in Old Bob. "I remember hearing how Billy's grandfather had this house built. He had t'wall built to last forever, or so he thought. He couldn't foresee how t'coast would change. But if I'd had owt to do with it, I'd have built t'wall further back, and I'd have made her in a curve, like, so t'waves'd run along and spend themselves."

Bill lay back on his bed, trying to shut the voices out of his mind, trying to forget the sea which drove in and in endlessly, setting the old house echoing with its throbbing, the deceitful sea which was playing against the cliffs now like a good companion. He could tell without looking the moment Gram went out on to the terrace. There was a quick silence, and Mr. Marvell said:

"And hasta any plans about fixing t'wall there, Liza? I see thy grandson has brought some rocks already."

Gram did not deny that Bill had brought the rocks to the hole.

"Tha mustn't worry about it, John," she said. "We're busy making plans, Bill and I."

"Good," boomed Mr. Marvell. "We wouldn't be sleeping in our beds at night, thinking of thee down here without any more protection than this. Tha'd best hurry up. September's a bad month for storms, as tha knows, but November can be a sight worse. Now tha must promise us this, Liza. If it looks like a big storm coming, thee and t'childer must hurry right up t'path back there and come to us. We want to make sure tha's not down here if a right November breeze blows up."

"Thankee, John," said Gram evenly. Bill could hear her setting a trayful of cups down on the iron terrace table.

"Look thee, love," said Mrs. Marvell suddenly. "How about thee and t'childer coming to us in any case, till t'winter's over at least."

"Nay, love!" said Gram. "It's kind of thee to ask us, but we're fine and snug where we are. Tha mustn't worry. We'll come away if there's any danger." Bill leaned over the sill and looked down at Gram, thinking of the way she had described *Dyle House* to him the night he and Merrie had arrived. He had asked her how old the house was, and she had answered:

"She's well over a hundred, lad, but she's young in her ways. She's been a house of flying arms and dancing feet and laughing voices, she's always been that. She's a lively, stubborn house, and the very best home anyone ever had!"

On the terrace below, Gram was saying now, "Look thee, it's my birthday, and no one is to be moping about. Sit down, everyone. There are more chairs stacked inside the porch. Has everybody a cup of tea? Pass the buns, Merrie, love. Now then, there's just Bill's cup. Where is the lad, I wonder? Here, Tim, I'll take your cup and saucer. Go and tell him to come, go and find him, that's a good lad."

Bill jumped from his bed and rushed downstairs. He

drank his tea and sat at the edge of the crowd, arguing with himself, telling himself there was nothing to worry about. But the uneasiness that had begun when he had first caught sight of the hole in the wall was a nagging feeling he could not thrust away. During the hour he spent waiting for the guests to leave, he imagined that the terrace was unsafe, that it was shifting below him. He heard someone say quietly to his neighbour:

"Aye, t'sea's moving up, there's no doubt of it. There's at least a yard less cliff on t'far side by Thornwick, and hasta seen t'latest fall over lighthouse way? I thank my lucky stars I don't live at t'edge of it, neither on t'cliff tops nor down below, like this."

Close on noon, when the village people began to leave, Tim's aunt insisted that the time had come to move Mrs. Prudern back to the caravan house. There were willing hands to carry her up the hill; they would take her on her mattress, and it could be brought back later.

Tim stole only one intent, unhappy look at Bill as he followed his mother away. Bill told himself it was a look of guilt and shame, and as he stood on the terrace with Gram and Merrie, waving good-bye to everyone, he stared at Tim's back and thought how disappointing it is to like someone and count him as a friend, and then to discover that he has been doing some thing mean and underhanded.

When the ravine was quiet once more, and Gram and Merrie had gone indoors, Bill went down to the *Fury*. He began to talk to her under his breath, as if she were alive.

"I don't care, I'm going to use Professor's money to buy you. You'll be the handsomest boat in Yorkshire. You're going to be much finer even than *Ginger* back home. You're more solid and so much stronger. I'm going to buy you, and I won't ever need to wonder if somebody's going to come and claim you." To think of the *Fury* as his own gave him a thrill of pleasure, but the next moment he felt strange—unhappy.

The tide was coming in. Bill leaned against the boat, his elbows on her deck, and watched the waves moving up the creek, tumbling recklessly over the shallow, smooth, low-tide water. The sea was fairly calm. There was no danger of any further damage to the wall today. And there was no outward reason for the decision which came to Bill, which made him walk away from the *Fury* with his mouth in a tight line and his shoulders hunched. He met Gram by the damaged corner of wall—she had come to call him for dinner—and right away he told her what he had decided. He made it sound so sure and settled that she could find no way to differ with him. He even managed to sound bright and enthusiastic about it.

"I've been thinking, Gram," he began. "We don't want to lose any time reinforcing this wall. I'll go back into the ravine this afternoon and cut down a tree and chop its branches into piles. Then I can dig a trench in front of the wall here and dig the piles in as deep as I can—you know, make a bulkhead of them, with planks nailed crossways in front. Then we can pile rocks against the bulkhead to give it extra strength. That ought to see us through the winter, and meanwhile I can finish the boat. The owners going to let me have her cheap. I can finish her during the winter and sell her in the spring. She'll be worth three times what I give for her, three or four times, I'm sure. She'll bring us at least half of what we'll need to have a new wall built, a really fine wall like the one at Budlington."

"But see here, lad—I can't let you . . ." was all Gram said. She lifted her head as if to say more, but tears sprang to her eyes, and without another word Bill led her quickly into the kitchen.



## Chapter 15

### BILL AT SCHOOL

ON September 10th, two weeks and a day after arriving in England, Bill climbed into the bus with the dozen other Flamborough boys who were on their way to St. George's School in Bridlington. Bill wore a navy-blue jacket with the school badge on its pocket, and a navy cap with a red stripe and a cross on it, both gifts from Gram; and under his arm he carried, wrapped in a towel, the pair of studded boots he had worn for football back in America and shorts, and a St. George's jersey. But he paid no attention to his clothes, except for looking down once or twice at his brown shoes, and thinking that it felt strange not to be wearing the white boots. He sat alone in his seat half-way down the bus aisle, trying to ignore the whispers and sniggers of the boys behind him. Rolf was there, he knew, and Pete and Tim, still carrying his arm stiffly in its white sling.

Tim had followed Bill to the bus. Turning into the tree-lined lane leading inland from the sea, Bill had heard Tim saying good-bye to his mother and his aunt at the caravan house. He had not looked back, but he had known that Tim was watching him as he came after him along the straight, shaded road. He had not seen Tim since Gram's birthday. He had seen Rolf and Pete twice on the cliff top, shooting bows and arrows, but it had been quiet in the ravine too quiet. Bill had a premonition that plans were being made to steal the *Fury* again, that at any moment the stillness of Gram's bay might shake into pieces.

The whispers behind Bill in the bus grew louder, till

the conductor, a stranger to Bill, scolded. "Now then, lads, we'll have no more of that. Stop it, sec." But soon the whispers rose again, and Bill could hear every word clearly.

"He thought he could come over here and run t'lot of us," said Rolf. "But we're showing him."

"He just goes walking around with his nose in t'air, like he owned t'whole village," said a boy Bill did not know.

"Aye, but it's right nice of him to repair our boat for us. We had a good look at her last night, after he'd gone to bed. It's a fair job he's doing on her and all." Thus in a merry guffaw from Peter.

As Bill stared out the bus window, the anger boiling inside him turned to helplessness. He pictured the *Fury* standing poised on her trestles where he had left her half an hour before. At first he forced himself to think about her, as he forced himself to think about something pleasant when a terrible dream wakened him in the night. But soon his head was full of plans for the rebuilding, and he was able almost to ignore the boys behind him. The *Fury* was his own boat now. The man from Bridlington had come. Bill had paid him the £17 5s. and had signed his own name on the papers of ownership. And though he had had to spend most of the week since then working on the bulkhead for the damaged wall, he had found time to bring his grandfather's mast from the loft, and had fitted it on to the *Fury* as easily as if he had had it specially made for her. Now there was the cabin to finish, and the caulking to do, and the enamelling of the hull, and the scrubbing and varnishing of the interior. And there was the sail to buy.

In the early spring he would have to find another job and save money to buy the kind of sail the boat deserved. He must be patient, but that did not matter now that he could feast his eyes on her every day and know she was his, at least for a while. It sent tingles of joy through him to look at her, though he was rebuilding her only to sell her, and in a few months she would be gone from Gram's

harbour. Someday next summer he might see her sailing by, moving swiftly and beautifully towards the Head with her new owner at her tiller.

Bill was dreaming about sailing himself in the *Fury* when the bus stopped and the Flamborough boys shuffled past him down into the street. Jumping out behind them, Bill followed at a distance. There were hearty shouts as other boys joined them, pummelling and jabbing at one another, hitting about with their boots which they carried tied together by their laces, walking with long, swinging strides. Rolf and Pete got ready to run a race. Rolf ran leisurely, flapping his arms, while Pete, running with all his might, soon grew out of breath and red in the face. The two turned, laughing and cat-calling, down the side street past the big field marked "Butts Close", past the mounds where townsmen had practised archery in feudal times, to the school entrance.

Far behind the other boys, as alone as if he were walking in solitude on the cliffs above *Dyke House*, Bill entered the long, low school building. He found the Headmaster's office half way down the corridor, knocked, and stepped into a large room with a desk in the middle. Behind the desk, poring over a folder of papers, sat the man known as the "Head", a bald, round-faced man with bright blue eyes, who took off his glasses and twirled them in his fingers, studying Bill intently all the while. There was something amiable and merry about the Head. Bill looked him straight in the face and grinned. The Head smiled back, and presently, with easy confidence, Bill was answering questions about what he had been studying in the States, and what his marks had been, and what sports he liked best.

"Good." The Head came around his desk to usher Bill into the corridor. "We'll try you with the boys your own age first. I'll show you to your form room. Don't worry if things seem different. Everything must look small and

old and—well, rather quaint to you after America. Are you settling down all right? Do you like Flamborough?" Bill thought of his boat and answered:

"Yes, sir, very well, thank you." The Head led Bill to a door behind which there was the noise of chattering and laughing. With his hand on the doorknob, he stopped and eyed Bill keenly.

"You're interested in boats, I hear," he said. "They tell me you've been rebuilding one."

"Yes, sir. She's nearly finished. She's going to be a beauty," Bill said eagerly, with no thought of the fight or the injury to Tim's arm. The Head opened the door and entered the classroom, with Bill behind him. At that instant, the chattering stopped as if a wind had wafted it away, and every boy in the room watched and listened as the Head said to the teacher before the class:

"This is Bill Walton, Liza Wade's grandson. You've heard about him." The teacher nodded, frowning slightly.

"We'll give him a try here," the Head went on. Then he dropped his voice, but Bill heard, "You'll let me know if there's - a - anything."

The Head left the room and Bill stood before a class of forty boys, all staring at him, some of them curiously, some in a taunting way. Rolf and Pete were among them, and several of the other boys who had been on the bus. And in the back row, directly in front of Bill, with his broken arm thrust out over his desk, sat Tim.

All thoughts of the *Fury* left Bill. He flushed, and felt his heart thump fast. The teacher said, "You'll find a seat at the back," and Bill walked slowly to the empty seat along the aisle, opposite Tim.

Through the morning lessons, Bill was careful not to look at the boys around him. Only once, when the teacher's back was turned and a folded square of paper fell on to his desk, Bill looked quickly to his left, trying to guess who

had thrown it. But he saw only Tim's eyes, gazing straight at him, deep and luminous behind his new horn-rimmed glasses. Stealthily Bill opened the paper under his desk and read.

*Thanks for repairing our boat for us. We'll ask you out for a sail in her sometime.* Bill screwed up the paper and poked it quickly under his desk top. His face showed no expression. No one looking at him could have guessed how furious he felt inside.

When games period came, and the boys scrambled out of the classroom to the shower room in the wing of the school to change into shorts, jerseys and boots, Bill went with them because he did not know what else to do. But he kept to one side, trying to slip along the corridors unnoticed. And in the shower room, after he had dressed and hung his jacket and trousers on a peg, he threaded his way in and out among the other boys, turning and turning, and it seemed to him that the others were trying to sweep him into their midst, to form a ring around him. He burst out of the shower room and hurried along the corridor and outside, down the steps to the playing field. There was no teacher in sight, no one to stop the boys of Bill's form from crowding after him, all talking about him now, as the boys on the bus had done.

Soon Rolf and another tall, thin boy named Arthur began to choose teams. Bill waited uncertainly, kicking at the turf, wondering what game the boys were going to play, and watching Rolf gather his players together. He could tell that the other boys admired Rolf and wanted to please him. It was clear they looked up to him as a fine athlete. He was taller than the others. His hair, rough and untidy from dressing, glinted like metal in the sun, and he was the most sunburned boy there. He stood very straight and confident and stalwart in the centre of his ring of players then raced away across the field. With the boys he had chosen whooping after him. But the boy named

Arthur stayed where he was, giving directions to his team. Tim was there, too, cuffing and boxing another boy with his good arm.

"We need one more and there's only Tim," Arthur said, "and—him. . . ." The boys looked over their shoulders at Bill, and Arthur called out,

"Say, can you play football?"

"Sure I can," Bill answered coolly. Arthur addressed his team.

"We'll have to take him then. There's nobody else till Tim can play again." Hurrying toward the centre of the field, Arthur shouted, "Come on now, team, let's get in there and win! Play t'same positions you played last year, but Jack, you play scrum half. Change places with Ted. And you"—Arthur pointed to Bill—"we'll give you a try as three-quarter."

"Three-quarter in football?" Bill stopped himself from asking it aloud. "This British football must be like some game I know," he told himself, "like soccer, maybe, but the ball's an oval like a football. It's a queer sort of game. Nobody has shoulder guards or even a helmet, and there are fifteen on each side instead of eleven."

Following the other boys of Arthur's team, Bill tried to guess from the positions they were taking where his place should be. He must have guessed rightly, for no one on his own side made any remark. But across the centreline, Rolf was laughing with Pete and the other boys near him.

"Look at t'Yank," he said. "Thinks he's big, he docs. Eh, he's a rum fisherman. He broke up t'boat for us his one and only time out."

The coach, a young man in sweater and shorts, came quickly on to the field, and the game began. Tensely Bill watched the moves of the boys around him, learning as the game progressed that players could kick the ball or throw it, or run with it, but they must not pass it to someone further forward than they themselves were. Bill

watched and waited, and when the ball came near him, he raced to it and kicked it with all his strength towards the opponents' line. Within half an hour, Bill had prevented Rolf's team a dozen times from scoring a try, and as he rushed into the fray, careless of hurts, he felt a thrill of pleasure at the sight of the worried looks on the faces of Rolf's team.

"So they think I can't play football, their football, anybody's football! I'll show them I wasn't captain of our team at home for nothing!" A minute later, with a well-timed pass, he sent the ball to Jack, the scrum half, who raced down the field to score for Arthur's team. Bill wanted to raise his chin and shout for joy, but instead he clenched his teeth, resolving to score a try himself, to dash down the field without relying on anyone else for help. He watched the opposing players closely, noting the slow ones and the weak ones. He waited what seemed an endless time, and suddenly he knew that the right moment had come. He rushed for the ball, jerked loose from the forwards trying to tackle him, swerved and hobbled to right and left, saw a path free before him, and with swift, long strides, ran to score his team's second try. Then came the goal-kick by Arthur, who sent the ball zooming over the bar, while Rolf and his team grew more and more intent and determined to win.

A short time after, still exhilarated from his run down the field, Bill saw Rolf racing for a high ball. Calculating the path Rolf must take, Bill moved in, tackling him around the legs and bringing him crashing to the ground. There was a whistle and a shout, "Foul! Foul!" Bill released his hold on Rolf and got to his feet, perplexed at first, then suddenly remembering that he had seen no boy being tackled who was not in possession of the ball. The game stopped and all the boys on the field stared at him.

"Crumbs!" somebody shouted. "That was the worst foul I've seen in years!" Bill whirled around, trying to see

who was speaking, trying to find the coach. As he looked about, Rolf lunged at him, punching him again and again. Bill reeled back and fell, and Rolf sprang on him, while the boys closed in, shouting wildly. Then above the shouts came the coach's voice.

"Enough of that now!" Bill felt a hand on his shoulder, and a stabbing pain in his shoulder blade, where he had struck the ground as he fell.

"Did you see him knock me down? Did you see him tackle me?" demanded Rolf excitedly. "I wasn't anywhere near the ball! He just had it in for me, that's all!"

"Now wait a minute!" The coach held Rolf firmly by the arm. "I saw what happened, and it's clear to me this lad doesn't understand the rules. He didn't know it's illegal to tackle unless the player has the ball. You ought to have seen that for yourself, Marvell! Now get back to the bench, both of you. I'll deal with you later!"

The words sounded ominous. Bill walked to the sidelines with his head up, though his back pained him so that he felt faint and ill. He sat at one end of the bench, with Tim in the middle and Rolf at the other end, and it seemed to him that Tim was looking not at Rolf but at him, as if he had something he wanted to say. But Bill kept his eyes straight before him, waiting for the pain to leave his back. After a while, he slid off the bench and walked swiftly, silently around the corner of the school building. He wanted to run, he did not care where. He knew if he tried to go straight home, around the edge of the playing field and along the Lamborough road, the coach would see him and call him back; and besides, he ought to change first into his regular school clothes. He would find his way from the shower room through the school to the door at the other end.

He let himself through the school door; but at a turning in the corridor, he heard footsteps. He stopped, and noticing that the steps were moving away from him, he



leaned against the wall to wait till it was safe to go forward. In the stillness, the voice of the Head came to him

"I'm afraid our young American needs bringing down a page or two. He's a charming lad, though I couldn't help liking him."

"Yes, he's good-looking and likeable all right, and I have a feeling he'll prove a first-rate student. But I shouldn't like to have to live down what that boy has to live down. Tim Pruderi doesn't look at all well. He's been through a very difficult time with that arm of his. The second speaker was Bill's form teacher. "It's a shame for poor Liza Wade. I saw her a few days before the boy and his sister were due, and I must say I've never seen an old woman look so young and happy. It must have been a shock to her when the boy hurt young Jim. I can't help thinking, though, the whole thing there under the cliffs was one kind of accident—or perhaps misunderstanding is more nearly the right word for it. It's too bad for the boy, really, when he's just lost his mother and is so new over here."

"Do you think we ought to take a hand in it somehow?" came the Head's voice again. Bill held his breath as he listened to the teacher's answer.

"There's not a lot we can do, from the looks of it, sir. I'm afraid the boys have it in hand. I hope it will all straighten out soon because honestly I've never known such an atmosphere in class."

When the voices and the footsteps had died away, Bill found the shower room, dressed, and hurried out, not towards the bus route but along the road to the cliffs. He sat down near the cliffs' edge, and flung his arms over his knees. It was like falling down into silence. Nothing stirred around him, and the sea as he stared at it seemed to grow bigger and bigger, to push farther out in all directions. It was a weird light-blue sea, like a sheet of glass roofing. There was not a wrinkle on it, and there was only

one little boat in sight, a steamer, far out, just a black streak with the lines of its funnels rising from it. It seemed to be riding above the horizon on a ribbon of air.

Bill reached into his pocket for the compass one of the boys at home had given him that last day when his friends had come crowding around him. He studied the compass, shook it, and put it away again. It only reminded him of his loneliness. To keep himself from thinking, he stood up and slouched along the cliff top, stopping every few yards to kick a rock loose from the soil and send it clattering down into the water. He walked the cliff for hours, past Sewerby Park and in the direction of Flamborough. Sometimes he skirted fields where herds of cows watched him, unmoving, chewing contentedly. He paid no attention. His eyes were on the sea. Now, since the storm, he never forgot the sea. In his mind it was pitted against him, always threatening, and though today it splashed the cliffs in a gentle way, he could not ignore it; it went on colouring his plans, and reminded him that he could not do the things he most wanted to do, and that he was far from the home he had loved. He had lost his parents, his friends, his home and his country, and since he had come to England, everything had gone wrong.

In his loneliness, he thought of his sister. She was one person who liked him as he was and didn't blame him for anything. He longed to be with her in the kitchen of *Dyke House*, playing with Tumbles on the hearth, and watching Joey Budge ring his bell and hop up the little ladder in his cage.

He began to run. He dropped into hollows and climbed up again, pounding through soggy, spongy grass. He grew hot in his school jacket, and his back pained him, but he ran on and on along the jagged cliffs till he reached the stairway down to Gram's bay and found himself at *Dyke House*, peaceful now, with a thread of violet smoke rising from its kitchen chimney. The bulkhead he had made of

heavy limbs fit snugly against the storm wall and gave the old house the appearance of a fortress, a stockade against the sea. He must work hard now to pile rocks against the bulkhead, to give it even more strength.

He let himself down the muddy incline to the first stair hacked into the cliffside. When he reached the level place he straightened himself and his eyes grew brighter, lit up by a new confidence. In spite of what the boys in Flam-borough thought about him, he was doing the best he could for Gram and Merrie. He was working to keep *Dyke House* safe, and he was sure the Professor would say that was what mattered most.

When he had gone down, and was walking across the white stones under the wall, birds were piping shyly, the creek was singing its way to the sea, and the house and terrace were not like a fortress any more, but cosy and lovely in the afternoon sun. He climbed on to the corner of the terrace close to the *Fury*, rounded the house, with the echo of his own footsteps following him, and looked through the kitchen window. Gram and Merrie were there. A cheery fire burned in the fireplace, and Gram was playing the organ while Merrie danced across the room, spinning, kicking out her legs, falling in a heap and laughing when Tumbles pounced on her.

"Hi, Gram. Hi, Merrie. Well, that's one day of school over with." Bill made his voice sound careless as he walked in, but his heart rose to his throat when he glanced at the kitchen clock and saw that it was only half-past three. School was not yet over. Gram would ask him why he had come home early.

Silently he stood drinking the glass of milk she poured for him, and eating the bread she buttered and placed on his plate. She looked at him closely only once, and he turned his face away. She must have seen that he was cut and bruised for a second time, but she said nothing. She did not even offer to bandage his hurts; and yet Bill felt

he could not stay where she was. He went out into the hall, with the sound in his ears of Merrie squealing in glee. Gram had let Joey Budge out of his cage, and now Tumbles was balancing on her hind legs, pawing the air as Joey flew low over her, zooming up and down like an aeroplane.

At least Merrie didn't notice anything funny about me, Bill thought, climbing the stairs. The last thing he heard as he reached the upstairs landing was his sister's shout:

"I do love Tumbles, don't you, Gram? And Joey! Please, may I take them to school with me when I begin after Christmas? Oh, Gram, I'm sure I shall love school!"

Bill drew a pad of paper and pen and ink from the top drawer of the brown chest. For a while he sat on his bed, holding the pad against the window sill and staring out to sea. Then he wrote, slowly and with bitter satisfaction:

*Dear Professor:*

*Please excuse me for being so long in writing. I have thought about you very often, but I have been busy ever since the day we arrived here.*

*You said it wouldn't be easy, and it isn't, but we are making out O.K. We lost the kitten as we were going aboard in New York, just after we said good-bye to you, but Gram has brought Merrie a new kitten very like Tumbles.*

*I found a sailboat being wrecked on the rocks. She is rather like Ginger, but three feet longer, and very sleek and strong. I'm rebuilding her. I had a job for one week, helping a fisherman, and earned a pound. I had to give £17 5s. of the money you gave me to buy the wrecked boat from her owner. I'm sure you would think she is worth it. I'm going to begin to paint her in a few days, and she'll look very fine. Then in the spring, I shall sell her because we need the money to have Gram's storm wall repaired.*

*We've had our first day of school today. St. George's School is a very handsome, modern building. Everything seemed very different from home, but . . .*

Bill stopped and twisted his pen in his hand as he gazed out over Gram's bay. Suddenly he blinked and rubbed his eyes. The fishing fleet was returning to harbour, all the boats together, and two hours earlier than the other afternoons lately, when they had been making two trips to sea each day. Bill listened to his watch, making sure it had not stopped, and turned his eyes to the boats again. They seemed to be stealing home, to be trying to creep in under the cliffs. Something must be wrong.

Quickly he stuffed his writing materials and the half-finished letter into the drawer of his bedside table, and put on his white boots. He hurried quietly downstairs into the main hall, through Gram's empty room, and out of the house by the back door. As he ran into the woods behind *Dyke House*, he thought he heard voices. He stopped in his tracks and crouched down, but silence fell, and he could hear only the autumn's last insects, moving slowly, close to the ground. And though he looked everywhere about him among the trees, he saw only the shifting green light filtering down through the branches. He stood up and ran on, up out of the ravine and towards North Landing. As he neared Flamborough Village, the air became sharp and thin, as if the oxygen were being sucked out of it.

It's a storm, another storm. That's why they're coming back early, thought Bill. In the high street he passed two women standing in a doorway, and heard one exclaim to the other:

"Tha'd best get on home, love. It's a queer sort of storm, this. It's done something to t'barometer. I thought it was broken, but Tomlinsons' is t'same. Tha'd best get straight home. Look at t'sky over there!"

Bill lifted his eyes as he hurried on. It was like night behind the lighthouse. An immense cloud was rolling in, growing blacker and more distinct as it came. But to his left, out over the sea, an uncanny, white light spread upwards across the sky. The light and the dark would meet

very soon over Flamborough Village; and the dark was a panther, lurking, ready to spring. There was as yet no wind, but birds were wheeling endlessly, the gulls screaming, the little ones twittering excitedly, as if they had nowhere to hide. And Bill felt a twinge of fear, sharp and real as the pain in his shoulder blade.

## Chapter 16

### THE FURY IS LOST

**F**ASTER and faster Bill ran towards North Landing, as if some deadly enemy were after him. Everywhere around him was a still, strange calm, with only the rumblings of thunder to disturb it. But as he paused at the cliff top before racing down the slipway, he saw that the sea was deepening in hue and churning itself into sharp crests that broke high against the cliffs. The waves far out sprang up to form a jagged line, blotting out the horizon, and seeming to close in upon the fishing boats struggling towards the entrance of the bay.

As Bill reached the beach, the wind came with a roar — the first stroke of the panther's paw — and the sand whirled at him in dusty flames till he could only stumble forward, bent over, with his arms shielding his face. In a moment every seam of his clothing was heavy with sand. A dark stain spread over the sea and the land, and the rain struck with the hissing noise shingle makes when waves drag at it.

The *New Hope* came in at an angle, with her crew clinging to her starboard side to keep her from capsizing. Mr. Marvell made no attempt to turn her to back her in. While still a few yards from the shore, he, George and Old Bob jumped out into the foam. Their figures loomed out of the darkness and the spray as they shepherded their boat in, and Bill plunged through the waves to help them, his feet stumbling over the slippery rocks.

As soon as Marvell's boat was safe, Bill ran with George to help the crew of Tom Janny's boat, which had heeled

over among the breakers. Bill worked with furious energy, grasping heavy baskets and staggering to the shore with them, as water streamed over him from the openings in their wicker work; clutching the tiller and the oars and gaffs before the waves could wash them away; salvaging the crab pots rolling from side to side in the boat's bows. Cold drove to the marrow of his bones, and his face, like the faces of the men around him, was flaming and smarting from the wind and salt water. He noticed how calmly and swiftly Tom Janny and the others worked. Every man's actions showed that he was used to the life of the sea, to rain and squalls and cold and crashing waves.

"Dosta mind t'November breeze that brought t'*Princess of Sunderland* on to t'rocks?" shouted Tom Janny to George when the coble had been drawn upon to the shore.

"Aye. She'd hardly struck t'cliffs before she was gone, and every man in her. Dosta think we're in for a storm like that, then?"

"It started t'same. I don't like t'way t'sea's moving. It's uncanny. Some of us had best stay and mind it doesn't fetch t'boats down from t'ships and smash them to tinder. Aye, there's summat queer about this one all right."

The cliffs had lost their brilliant whiteness. They seemed to shrink back as the waves pounded them, and it was the cascades and billows of foam that caught Bill's eye when he looked up, watching the black cloud steal up from behind the lighthouse. Directly overhead, the sky was still strangely light, and on the farthest point of cliff to his right, a solitary figure showed out like black cardboard against white. It was the figure of a boy, waving one arm, then running along the cliff edge and down the slipway. Bill saw very soon that it was Tim.

Bill turned back to help Tom Janny and his crew tip the water from their coble. While the men held the boat on her side, Bill reached for a bucket and began to bail quickly, unaware that Tim was coming straight towards



him. The men lowered the coble again and Bill glanced over his shoulder. Tim was a few yards away, lunging against the wind and flying sand. But what made Bill stop with his bailing bucket poised in mid-air was the look in Tim's face, scared and yet burning with eagerness. Then came Tim's cry.

"Bill! Your boat! The fellows have got it!" Bill felt an icy hand on his wrist. He stared down into Tim's enormous, dark eyes and understood immediately, as if he had been rehearsing these very words to himself ever since he had dragged the *Fury* home. What he could not understand was that Tim was saying "them."

"You're come!" Bill whispered. But Tim went on, stammering in his excitement, "They—they've p-put to sea, Bill! They're sailing around the Head! They're going to beach her near the lighthouse! They have a hiding place there!"

"To sea!" Bill was unbelieving. "To sea, in this storm? They'll capsize! And what have they used for a sail?"

"Rolf got a sail. It's his father's, but his father doesn't know!" Tim gazed imploringly into Bill's face, and waited where he was, hunched over and shivering, as Bill turned and ran towards Mr. Marvell.

"Mr. Marvell! Mr. Marvell! Rolf and Pete are out in my sailing boat! They're trying to get around the Head!" he shouted while he was still a long way off. Mr. Marvell dropped the baskets he was holding, and Bill saw the colour drain from his face as he looked out to sea. Bill raced on to George, high on the sand with the day's catch, while Mr. Marvell ran to the crew working nearest the *New Hope*, then on to the other boats. In a moment the beach was deserted, and the "put-put-put" of the winch drawing the cobbles on to the slipway came to a stop as the fishermen ran up the concrete stairway to the cliff top. Climbing the hill, with Tim behind him, Bill watched the broad doorway of the lifeboat house open, and saw for the first time

the shining red, white and blue hull and the gleaming brass fittings of the Flamborough lifeboat. With racing heart, he ran round the right side of the lifeboat house and through its back door.

Inside, some of the fishermen were hurrying into oilskins and sou'westers and huge white life-belts, while others were preparing the winch which was to lower the lifeboat, the *Howard D.*, on her cable down the slipway.

"They'll be square off Flamborough Head by now, I don't doubt," one of the men said.

"Aye," said another, "and t'lads couldn't have chosen a worse spot with t'wind getting up and t'tide coming in!"

The men had their eyes on 'Tom Jammy, the cox'n, already at work uncovering the lifeboat's engine. There was a scramble of footsteps when he called out, "All right now, get aboard, lads, there's not a minute to lose!"

No one noticed Bill putting on the oilskin and sou'wester he found on a hook at the back of the lifeboat house, and the life jacket he pulled from the side of the *Howard D.* No one saw him crouch in the shadows, crouch and wait while the men, dressed as he was, climbed into the lifeboat. As the *Howard D.* began to ride forward, with the storm rushing at her and the men riveting their eyes to the sea, Bill stood up, jumped to gain a handhold over the boat's side, braced his feet on the hull, drew himself up, and sprang aboard, landing at George's side. One or two of the men near by noticed him then, but his face was hidden under the sou'wester, and no one questioned him. The *Howard D.*, with her paint glowing weirdly under the blackening sky, glided forward till she was astride a huge metal table, then an inch farther and the table overbalanced to give her the first quick push down the slipway.

Furtively Bill counted the men with him in the boat. There were eight besides himself, all of them fishermen who had just returned to the landing. Below, men were bringing the skids, the heavy planks to be placed parallel,

like railway sleepers, to bear the lifeboat's weight across the sand to the water's edge.

When the boat's prow grazed the first of the skids, the heavy wire cable was loosened from her stern, and a team of fifteen strong young men began to tug her towards the water. It was the old men, the retired fishermen, who ran back and forth carrying the skids left behind to their new places in front of the lifeboat. Before she reached the water, the engineer moved to the boat's steer control panel, and Tom Janny, taking his place astride the leather cushion at the wheel, started the engine. Soon Bill found himself clinging to the guard rail, steadily himself with arms taut as the *Howard D.* fought her way to sea, with water surging across her bows even in the shelter of North Landing. George, still at Bill's side, started to speak; but at the sight of Bill, his mouth opened in amazement and he stared out to sea again, without a word to the others.

Soon the lifeboat passed the edges of the cliffs. A jar ran through her and there were a number of sharp cracks when the wind struck her broadside. She tipped sharply, and Bill and the others clung to the rails while Tom Janny steered her towards Flamborough Head. As she bounced and swerved over the dully glowing waves, everyone aboard peered through the darkness for the shape of a sailboat. Half an hour went by and still the men watched tensely, saying nothing. An SOS rocket went off from the Head and hung for an instant like a red ruby in the sky. Through the storm, Bill could see the dim shapes of men on the cliffs.

Then, as the lifeboat drew near the lighthouse, Mr. Marvell shouted, "There!" and pointed to a white dot out beyond the Head. Bill felt George's arm stiffen, and heard him draw in his breath sharply.

"They're rounding t'Head and that's a dangerous spot. They'll be caught in t'cross-currents!" said George for only Bill to hear.

The lifeboat sped towards the *Fury*, the men in her watching helplessly, gasping when the little sailing boat heeled, or when a blast of wind struck her and she luffed and came up into the gale, her sail shaking, and shot forward with foam spurting from her bows. Suddenly she dipped till her sail touched the water, and Bill shut his eyes. She would surely go over! Why didn't they lower her sail? But then he looked again—the lifeboat was sweeping near now—and saw that the boys in the boat could not lower the sail. They must have tied it to the mast, rowed out beyond the breakers, and stepped the mast so that the sail filled and carried them straight to sea.

One of the figures in the *Fury's* cockpit was huddling with his head against the floor; but the other was still trying to steer. He had thrown himself over the tiller, holding on with all his strength, straining to head the boat into the gale. That was proving impossible with the wind veering from one quarter to another, blowing sometimes with hurricane force. The sail streamed with rain; the few lines of rigging whizzed and crashed against the mast and the sides of the boat's cabin.

The lifeboat was only a few yards away now, and everyone aboard her was shouting, but still there was no sign of recognition from the sailing boat. no sound but the wild, desolate cries of sea and sky, shrieking to the men to turn back.

But all at once the boy at the helm stood up and turned to stare dazedly at the rescuers. Bill screamed at him to crouch down, to hold on, and watched in horror as the *Fury's* boom swung over, knocking the boy overboard. For an agonizing moment, with everything of sea and sky seeming to rock and whirl, Bill searched the sea and saw nothing. He was terribly afraid; all his terrors rushed together in his mind.

"We're too close! He'll come up under us! We're going to ram the *Fury*! He'll be caught in the blades of the

propeller!" Bill pressed himself against the lifeboat's side, holding his breath, waiting. A head appeared. An arm shot up over the *Fury's* side and the boy clung there.

"Get him! Pull him in!" Bill shrieked through clenched teeth to the boy huddling in the *Fury's* cockpit. But there was no movement, no sign the boy had heard through the breaking water. Bill saw the struggling boy's arm slipping, slipping over the cockpit gunwale.

"Stand by now, lads! Get ready with t'belincs! Heave when I give t'word! Ready!" The command was a far-away echo in Bill's mind. Frozen to their posts, the men waited for that infinitesimal moment when the lifeboat and the sailboat would be close enough together. Bill felt George's shoulder hard against his own; he heard Tom Janny's cry, "Ready now!" and saw George poise with his line. The boy clinging to the sailing boat was reaching out, falling backwards . . . A line snaked out, and in that split second, a wave swept down and hit the *Howard D.* on her port side. The starboard rail dipped, and Bill threw himself at the port rail above him. He clung to it as the *Fury* came straight towards him. The top of his boot caught on the canopy over the lifeboat's engine. He felt himself sliding down a wave's back, helplessly spinning down deep under water.

Then he found he could move his arms and legs, and he fought back to the surface. His head hit something hard. He threw his hands up and gripped a piece of wood, and knew right away it was the *Fury's* rudder. He let go and came up, but sank once again. His boots were full of water and his oilskin was waterlogged. He felt with a sense of wonder that he was drowning. But another wave caught at him from below, shooting him to the surface for a second time. His sou'wester was over his face now, and he could not see; but his shoulder grazed the *Fury's* stern, and with a desperate lunge he threw his arm up and over the cockpit.

He heard George's voice, it seemed from the far, far distance, "Man overboard!" and another man's shout:

"Look there! Somebody's got hold! There, at the stern! Throw another line! Throw a line!" The distance between the *Fury* and the *Howard D.* widened by yards even as the shout came, but Bill did not notice. He saw that the boy who had fallen overboard still had hold of the *Fury's* side. Bracing himself against the rudder, Bill drew himself over into the cockpit, tugged the helpless boy by both arms around to the stern and pulled him quickly, head first, down on to the floor boards. The boy lay heaving and sobbing, and Bill saw that it was Rolf; but he had no time to help him further.

The wind was catching at the little boat, spinning her around. A wave broke upon her, and she heeled over with a violent lurch. There was a roar of water as she was wrenched upwards and dashed down again into a trough. It was like being caught in a waterfall. Bill fell forward on to his face in the cockpit. Struggling to his feet, he threw himself back, grasping the tiller, trying to put the boat's stern into the next giant wave. She skidded, and as Bill tugged at the tiller, she shuddered and darted forward. The sail filled with a whoosh! and the *Fury* raced away, not towards the open sea now, but with the wind behind her, back towards Gram's bay.

She gathered speed. She planed down the waves like a surfboard. In a trough, she stood trembling an instant, the wind cut off from her by the mountains of water behind her. But the mountains turned to avalanches, rushing down at her, forcing her up and up on her beam ends, and when she had reached the summit, the mountain crest would strike her a staggering blow and she would fly down into a trough again, while Bill tried to steady her, holding to the tiller with all his might.

"Get as far aft as you can!" he shouted to Rolf and Pete on the bottom boards. He felt the boys' weight against his

knees as another wave lifted the *Fury*. He tugged at the tiller, in dread that the boat would fall broadside to the sea. The boys crowded more and more tightly against him, and covered their eyes with their hands. Bill did not look down at them, and he did not glance back at the lifeboat, which turned in a wide arc and came after him, nearer and nearer the cliffs, till there was barely sea room to get away. He did not see the drawn faces of the men standing ready with their lifelines, nor hear Mr. Janny give the order that turned the *Howard D.* back towards the open sea again. Through the storm, Bill could see only one thing, the inlet, the bay with its narrow creek driving in beyond *Dyke House*. He cried aloud to his boat:

"You've got to do it, you've got to get in there, you've got to! Come on, *Fury*, come on!" His injured back pained him; every muscle ached from the awful pull of the sea on the tiller. The wind was trying to lift the little boat out of the water, trying to crush her as she sped towards the shore.

And then the *Fury* entered a white world. Troughs and crests alike were white now, and Bill could see nothing, not even the ghostlike cliffs rearing over the breakers. He gasped. His heart beat hard in his throat, in his ears. They were too near the cliffs; they would be sucked in and cut to pieces and there was no time to tear down the sail! No time . . . No hope! Bill closed his eyes. In the whirling spray he could scarcely breathe.

"Oh, dear Lord," he prayed. "Help me turn her! Help me get her by the cliffs!" The *Fury's* sail flapped wildly as he bore down on the tiller with both arms. There was a jolt. He felt himself falling. A wave lifted the boat and drove her, spinning and dipping, as his arms were torn from the tiller and he was thrown over the boys in the cockpit.

But a moment later he rose up, ashen-faced and shaking in every limb. He jumped forward, fell back, and jumped

forward again. He set his teeth together, lunged for the painter, and leaped over the side of the *Fury*. There was a scraping sound as the hull struck ground. Tugging on the painter, Bill plunged through the waves to the ridge of solid ground before him, and when he had reached it, he stared to right and left, unable to believe his eyes. The wave which had lifted the *Fury* had carried her not against the cliffs but into Gram's creek, straight up the creek to the only place beyond *Dyke House* not yet flooded.

With water pouring from his boots at every step, Bill waded back to grasp the sailing boat's prow. Rolf lifted himself to his knees and stared at Bill, crying:

"We're safe! You brought us in! Wh - where are we?" But Pete lay in the bottom of the boat without moving. Bill jumped in and bent over him.

"Are you all right? Can you get up?" He felt the boy's face, he put his hand quickly on the boy's chest, and with a surge of joy heard:

"I - I'm all right. I - I hit my head." Pete lay there, his teeth chattering violently. Bill lifted him from the boat, supporting him with his shoulders.

"Bill, I - I'm sorry about taking the boat," Pete mumbled, and Bill said, "Forget it. Now come on. We'll get into the house as fast as we can."

Together, Bill and Rolf helped Pete through the water towards *Dyke House*. Foam scudded past them, and the water was waist-deep, so swiftly pressing that they could scarcely move their feet. Slowly they crossed the place where Gram's garden had been, and Bill pulled himself on to the terrace, drawing Pete, then Rolf, after him. He noticed that the two trestles that had supported the *Fury* were gone, and thought vaguely, as if he were dreaming, the boat won't be safe back there if the storm gets any worse. I'll have to drag her to the house and tie her up somehow . . .



Bent forward to shield themselves from the wind and spray, the two boys helped Pete across the terrace to the kitchen door. A few yards before them, great waves marched in and flung themselves over Gram's wall. But it was not the waves that held Bill spellbound, that made him stare at his feet as he crossed the terrace; it was the slapping and gurgling he could hear under him. Was he imagining it or was the terrace sinking even as he and the others crossed it?

Gram was in the doorway, with Merrie clinging to her skirts. Bill called above the wind and hurried faster. He saw that the old woman was crying as she put her arms around him, as she helped the boys indoors.

"You're safe! God bless you, you're all safe! I - I watched you coming in. I never saw a boat sail so fast. You know a bit about sailing, Bill, lad!" She hurried to move chairs near to the fire. She made the boys sit down, and helped them out of their wet clothing, wrapping them in the blankets she had been warming.

Bill drank the mug of hot tea Gram handed to him, but soon he was walking around the room, restless and uneasy. The waves were coming in, tremendous, unhurrying. They were running wild, roaring and snarling, blotting out the cliffs with their spray. There was no shelter in the bay now. The breakers were so strong that they did not fall back at the cliffs but veered sideways and rode forward to drive up over the terrace and tumble into the garden and into the creek. Bill murmured something about the *Fury*, went upstairs for dry clothing, and out again into the wind and rain.

Then as he stood at the side of the terrace, trying to see his boat, the rain lessened. The sucking, gurgling sound under him seemed to grow softer; and the wind changed from a shriek to a low moan. He could see the boat now, safe on the sandy ridge back near the woods. He looked up and caught sight of a group of men on the cliff. They were

waving at him, and he knew they were trying to tell him they could not get through to *Dyke House* because of the water in the ravine. He waved back at them, almost jauntily, and stayed outside a while longer, watching the sky overhead lighten, watching the sun come out, huge and red and heavy-looking. Then, shading his eyes and waving again at the men above him, he returned to the kitchen. He blew playfully on his sister's neck, and when he looked at Gram, he could not help laughing. Her face was rosy with joy. She was hurrying with her little bobbing steps to take the covers from the bird cages.

"Perk up, loves!" she called. "It's all over. Come on now, give us a song!" She let the canaries out of their cages and they fluttered around her and settled on her fingers to let her stroke them.

But Joey Budge acted strangely, as if he were still afraid. Bill had never before seen him cowering as he was now in the bottom of his cage. When Gram reached in to him, he did not rouse himself or even caress her hand, but drew himself into a tighter ball and hopped farther into the shadows. Perhaps Joey sensed all the time that the storm was not really over. Gradually everyone in *Dyke House* began to realize it. The curtains hung limp when Gram opened the windows, and something was wrong with the air. It seemed to weight everybody's arms and legs till it was hard to move, and Rolf and Pete, dressed now in the dry clothes Bill brought downstairs for them, sat on Gram's settle and put their heads in their hands. No one spoke, and in the heavy dampness, everything seemed to stand on tiptoe, waiting.

## Chapter 17

### THE SEA STRIKES AGAIN

BILL could tell from the slant of the hail thrashing the terrace that the wind had changed its course; the storm was coming from a different direction this time. There were eerie whistles as the wind drove in, each gust beginning with a soft cry and rising till it struck *Dyke House* with all its force. Window panes cracked with their rattling, the kitchen door burst open, and the cups in the cupboard swung on their hooks. Clouds of smoke forced back down the chimney and into the room made everyone cough, and Gram's dinner bell fell from its ledge with a loud, ringing clatter. All of this happened in the time it took Bill to throw on his mackintosh and find the coil of rope he had bought a few days before in Bridlington.

"I'm going for the boat, Gram," he said quietly. "I'll just bring her back and moor her by the wall where she'll be safe." Before Bill could open and close the door, he found Rolf at his side.

"I'll come along and give you a hand." The words were more an entreaty than a statement. Bill did not answer, but led the way across the terrace and down into the water. His eyes streaming in the wind, he peered into the storm till he caught sight of the low, dark shape of the *Fury*, rolling back and forth a distance farther along the creek than he had left her. He and Rolf reached her and worked quickly to unship the rudder, wrap the sail tightly around the mast, and tip the water from her. Finally, grasping her painter and tugging, shoulder to shoulder, the two boys started back to the house. With their heads lowered to

protect their faces from the hail, they began to shout to one another.

"I don't understand why it's started again like this, and from the south-east this time!" exclaimed Rolf. "The house is cut off already, and there's a whole hour to go till high tide!"

"We couldn't get up out of the ravine, that's sure," shouted Bill. "We'd be swept off our feet back there where the creek gets narrower. It's hard enough standing here!"

Bill and Rolf gripped one another by the arm as they struggled on. Their feet left the ground each time a wave came in, and the water rose often as high as their shoulders.

After half an hour of moving forward a few inches at a time, they pulled themselves on to the terrace and moored the *Fury* to the corner-post of the little porch by the kitchen door. Panting with exhaustion, they waited to see if the rope would hold the boat fast.

Bill glanced up at the cliff top again. A lorry was there with its headlights on, but through the hail and spray, he could not see if anyone was there with it. He said nothing to Rolf, but thought, it's Mr. Marvell's lorry. He's come to get us away, but he won't be able to get through. It's sure to be over his head back there where the ravine's so deep and narrow. He couldn't make it even if he tried it with a boat. It must be full of whirlpools, and the current would be dead against him.

Bill and Rolf went inside, closing the door with a bang behind them. Gram, with Merrie close behind her, came to help them out of their sodden clothing. It was Rolf who said:

"It's terrible out there. We're cut off, we're nothing but a little island, and you ought to see the waves!"

Gram flashed Rolf a quick, intent look, and put her arm around Merrie, but the little girl had already begun to whimper.

"Tell it to go away, Gram! Don't let it come any nearer! Tell it to stop!"

Gram led Merrie back to the fire and held her tight.

"Come, Merrie, love," she said soon after "We'll get some paper and crayons and I'll draw you a house, a house with a lovely garden and lots and lots of flowers."

"I like ours, Gram? Will you make a garden like ours used to be before the water came and washed it away?" Gram did not answer, but began to draw on her pad on the kitchen table, and Bill, Rolf and Pete gathered about her, absently watching, listening to a sound that drew ever closer, as if under them a stream were tearing away its bank. Bill's thoughts were like soldiers marching, one after another in quick succession.

"Gram Merrie, Rolf Pete and I. I will carry Gram. Rolf will carry Merrie. Pete's getting his strength back now. He can manage . . ."

The waves dashed nearer. They were slipping against the posts of the little porch now. A stream of water crept under the door and grew into a pool, and puddles formed under the windows. Bill brought a basin and a cloth to mop them up, but they were there again almost as soon as he removed them. He went back to the table where Gram was drawing, and stood behind the others, where he could see the oil lamp Gram had lit and hung on a crossbeam. The lamp had moved only slightly at first, but now it swung to and fro like a pendulum. As it swung towards the windows, it cast its light on the torrents of water running across the terrace and bursting into plumages of spray when they struck the house.

Bill told himself that the house could not be rocking, that it was the wind that made the lamp swing. The wind would die down again before long. But as he listened and hoped and prayed, the wind rose from a wail to a scream and still it rose, till it was a deafening thunder. Gram stopped her drawing and moved to her rocking chair. Her

face was tense and troubled as she sat rocking, with Merrie in her lap. Rolf came to Bill to lay a trembling hand on his arm, and Bill could only stand as he was, frowning and clenching his fists.

"I'm scared, Bill, aren't you?" Rolf whispered. "It's coming too high. We're cut off, we can't get away!"

Pete fastened his round eyes on Bill's face, as if he were telling himself that Bill had it in his power to save them, the way he had done two hours before.

And then suddenly everyone was standing in the centre of the kitchen, and Bill was taking Merrie from Gram's arms. The lamp blew out and it was too dark to do anything but hear and feel.

"It's trying to get in, Gram!" Merrie cried. "Oh, tell it to go away!"

The wind was a whining siren, the waves were giant hearts, beating harder and harder. The sky had gone mad; it seemed the water and sky were tumbling together, that the land was disappearing completely. With quick reports like explosions, *Dyke House* strained against the storm, against the sea that was scooping the sand from under it. Bill was certain now that the terrace was breaking up, that the sea wall lay torn into chunks, that everything was falling to pieces while he and the others stood there dumbly, doing nothing. He handed Merrie to Rolf and fumbled in the darkness for the lamp hanging overhead, found a box of matches on the hearth, and after several tries, lit the lamp and hung it up again. It sent its wavering light over the faces of the little group around Gram, making them look strange and unreal. For what seemed an age, no one looked up, no one spoke. Then Gram said.

"The door's blown open again. I'll shut it."

"No, Gram!" Bill shouted, beside himself with fear for Gram. He forced himself to move to the door, to shut it against the swirling water. He made Rolf and Pete bring the kitchen table and the two heaviest chairs. But when he

had jammed them behind the door and walked away, ankle-deep in water now, the door opened, slowly, inch by inch, and the waves flooded in again.

Bill began to push Gram and the others out of the kitchen into the hall, and through the empty room whose chandelier had shattered on the floor. The water followed them, bringing with it Gram's rocking chair, as if trying to help it, too, to escape. Waves were rippling over Bill's boots as he gathered everyone at the back door.

"I'm going to bring the *Fury*," he said in a low voice. "The waves will carry us back into the ravine, the waves and the current . . ."

"Yes, lad," breathed Gram. "Do it and hurry. It looks like our only chance."

## Chapter 18

### ESCAPE

**R**OLF and Pete did not follow Bill out into the yard. Drawing Gram and Merrie with them, they went as far as the back porch, where they clung to the posts, watching Bill push his way slowly towards the *Fury*. He clutched at the wall of the house when the waves dashed in, and sometimes only his head showed above the whiteness of the water. Beyond him, beyond where the sailing boat lurched and slammed against the broken pieces of the wall, the waves and the water of the creek were running together with such force that sheets of spray jerked upward, not to fall back but to fly as solid stretches of sea, far inland.

They watched, hypnotized by those great sheets, horror-stricken and yet fascinated. They saw Bill reach the boat, and with his pocketknife cut the rope that was holding her fast. They watched him struggle towards them, clinging to the boat's prow as a wave dashed over him, forcing him under. 'The crush' of the water turned the prow around, pulling Bill back into the yard and exposing the *Fury's* side to the current. Another crest flung itself over her, half filling her with water and foam. A third wave, higher still, caught at her and she turned over.

Bill clung to her, clawing with his fingers. He was swallowing salt water now. He could not touch bottom and he knew he could not hold on much longer. Rolf and Pete saw that he and the boat would be washed away unless someone got to him and helped him. Both boys plunged into the water, pulling themselves along the wall till they could reach out from its corner. In a lull in the



waves, they threw themselves out into the yard to grasp Bill's hand, so they and Bill could combine their strengths to pull the *Fury* upside-down into the shelter of the house.

Holding the boat by her gunwales, they righted her, bailed her out as well as they could, and climbed to the porch. They found only Merrie there, shouting at them against the storm. Bill knelt and put his cold, wet face against hers. She was sobbing.

"Gram's gone back! Gram's gone back!"

"Where?"

"I don't know! And we forgot Tumbles, Bill! Please, let's get Tumbles!" She held on to her brother's jacket as if she would never let go, but Bill told Pete to hold her, left Rolf with the rope holding the *Fury* close to the porch, and went indoors.

The water in the big room sloshed back and forth, and the floor seemed to be shifting and sinking. Bill plunged across it and into the hall, calling:

"Gram! Where are you, Gram?" He could hardly hear his own voice above the roaring of the waves trying to wrench the house from its foundations. But then Gram appeared above him on the hall stairway. She came steadily down, and Bill saw that she was holding Tumbles in her hands. He strained towards her, calling her name. Suddenly the kitten jumped from her hands and disappeared. Bill searched the water and peered up the stairs. He turned around so that he could see every part of the hall. There was no scampering shape on the stairs, no darker spot in the foam, and he could not wait to search further. He lifted Gram and carried her back across the big room, setting her down inside the door to the porch.

"I went back to take the birds upstairs, lad," she whispered breathlessly, "but I couldn't find Joey, not a trace of his cage or him. I'm afraid there's not much chance for the others, nor for the kitten . . ."

When Bill opened the back door, Merrie ran to him,

crying, "You haven't brought Tumbles! Where's Tumbles?"

"She's upstairs with the birds," Bill said. "Don't worry, Merrie. She'll wait for us. She'll be all right." Merrie struggled in his arms.

"Oh, please, Bill," she sobbed. "I want to go upstairs with Tumbles! I don't want to go in the water! I want to go back!"

There was no time to reason with her, and Bill lifted her into the boat, where Rolf and Pete held her while Gram climbed aboard. Without a pause, Bill pushed off, giving the *Fury* her start towards the creek bed.

The events that followed formed an indistinct, whirling picture in Bill's mind, a picture without beginning or end. Fear was like a knife stabbing his chest, and blasts of wind searched out his mouth and crammed themselves down his throat. He tried to gasp but could not, though his lungs felt ready to burst. He was aware of the sounds most of all, of the screeching of the wind, and Merrie's voice rising shrilly, "Mommie! Mommie!"

There were violent thumps, there was a heavy, deafening fall of water. Then came a crackling noise, and it was as if a fantastic, icy flame were covering the little boat, a dark, shining flame which shot above her and crashed down upon her, an incandescence that was everywhere, in Bill's eyes and throat, all around him and inside him. Wild birds cried as they tried to find shelter, as they faltered, beating with their wings, being pulled off their course. And there were shapes in the waves. Were they shapes of boats or of roofs rolling and pitching? Was one of those shapes the roof of *Dyke House*? Bill wondered hazily, and yet part of him was terribly, painfully alive, screaming out:

"Oh, God, don't let us be pulled to sea!" and marking as if by instinct which way the *Fury* must go, though he had no power to move her himself.

"Into the creek! Into the channel!" He knew he was yelling it aloud, he knew that striking the current inland was the only hope of escape.

The wind held the sailing boat motionless. Then it began to push her sideways, slowly outwards towards the sea. Bill froze as he was, poised above the others, and a blinding terror seized him, like a giant hand squeezing his stomach, and all the world grew black and lost its shape. They were slipping, veering to one side. The water snaled viciously around them, and it seemed as if the *Fury* were rolling over. She started. There was a swift snap as her bow bounded upwards and she sprang to life, jerking with a movement that might have torn every board of her separate from the next. She flew up, up, more and more swiftly, balanced on a knife edge. A great white light shattered over Bill's head, splintering on his eyeballs. The little boat rose and still rose, mounting a furiously moving, unearthly roller coaster. Below Bill in the cockpit, Gram held Merrie in her arms, and stared straight ahead, her face rigid, dazzled by fear. There was a violent thud and the *Fury* dipped and flew down a steep plane. Bill fell over the others, striking his forehead against the cabin. In the blind thrill of the descent he lost consciousness, and yet he knew he was holding with all his strength to the cabin wall.

Banging and scraping, the *Fury* came to a standstill. The storm was everywhere about her, but she lay motionless on her side. Bill got to his feet, gazing around him, and down at Gram and Merrie and the boys, all of them lifting themselves from their crumpled positions on the floor.

The little boat had come far inland, far up the narrow ravine of Danes Dyke, on the crest of a tidal wave, a high, powerful wall which had gathered itself mysteriously far out at sea, and which struck the *Fury* just as she was being sucked into the breakers. Bill recognized, a few feet away,

the little bridge which led across the deepest part of the hollow. He put his hands on the others in the cockpit, shouting in a hoarse voice:

"Gram, Merrie, hey! Hey, everybody, we're safe! We're safe!"

"Wh-where are we?" mumbled Rolf.

"We're safe! We're on dry land! Is everybody all right? Oh, I feel as if I'm dreaming! We're safe!" Bill was laughing now in his joy. "Oh, Gram, we're safe!"

Gram stood up, smiling at her grandson. He reached down to her and felt her shoulder tremble. She seemed so tiny, and so very, very tired. He jumped out of the *Fury*, into the prickling bracken and dank-smelling mud. He lifted Gram out. Then he took Merrie into his arms and hugged her against his face. As Rolf and Pete climbed over the boat's side, a group of men came running from the hilltop. One of them took Merrie from Bill and held her gently, as if she were a newborn baby. Someone lifted Gram and began to carry her slowly up the hill. Mr. Marvell embraced Rolf, then led him away, half carrying him, supporting him under his arms. Two men made a chair with their hands and carried Pete. An arm went round Bill's waist, and he looked up to find that it was George.

"Come on, lad. You've done enough for one day. I'll help you to 'top."

Bill was shivering uncontrollably in the cold. Salty water ran down his face and into his eyes, and his lips were rimed with salt and stinging. But thrills ran through him, and a happiness that was a glowing fire. He flashed a brilliant smile at George.

"Gee, thanks, George," he said, and he began to climb at the young man's side, gladly, with all his energy. But the grass and bushes between the boat and the path clung to his boots as if to force him back; the brambles scratched his hand; and his feet sank into the mud, leaving boot-

prints that filled with water. Everything seemed to have gone limp and lifeless, and yet the wind must have been still at its height, for as the procession moved up the hill, a young oak was torn from the ground by its roots. Bill saw it as if through a fog. The people before him seemed to be moving farther and farther away, shrinking to miniature. He gazed at George at his side. He grew confused. His eyes felt hot and burning. He wanted to run forward, to stand on the hill in front of the crowd and shout something about the great wave, about how it had saved everyone in the *Fury*. But he felt a curious unwillingness in his feet. He leaned forward, and his feet seemed to sink backwards under him.

Then suddenly he had no strength at all.

"Are you all right, lad?" It was George's voice. Bill heard it perfectly, but could not answer. He had gone down to his knees, and he was amazed that he could understand all George said to him. He could even look up and smile, as twinges of joy ran through him. But he could only think an answer. sure, I'm all right! We're safe! We're - all - safe! The words rushed through him, scrambling, repeating themselves. He tried to stand up, and it seemed to him he could never move again. George caught him as he fell forward on to his face.

## THE AFTERMATH

TWO hours later Bill awoke from a dream in which he was running to meet his mother. He saw her ahead of him in the road; he saw her go into a white house. But as he drew near, the ground shook, a crevice yawned open, and the house tumbled into it, shattering and crumbling as it fell. Bill's eyes flew open and he sat upright, remembering the storm. It wasn't like remembering; it was seeing the whole picture of the escape in the *Fury* slumming before his eyes; and as he saw, fear clutched his throat so that he couldn't swallow.

It was dark around Bill's bed, but a distance away, a candle sent wavering lights and shadows across the walls, and showed him there was a second bed in the room. Someone was in the bed, but there was no sound, nothing to tell him where he was. He threw back the blankets covering him and lowered his feet to the floor. Dizziness overcame him. He gripped the edge of his bed to steady himself. When he stood up, the floor seemed to tilt and rock under him, and he thought he must be still asleep. Then someone spoke to him from the other side of his bed. As he twisted himself around, he saw that a second candle was in the room, lighting a table on which a model boat lay. It was a model of the *Fury*, perfect in every detail; and oddly, the black and red colouring of its hull was exactly what Bill had planned for his sailboat, but hadn't yet had time to begin.

Bill found himself looking at Tim, hearing Tim call across the room, "He's awake, Mother. He's all right!"

Letting himself down to the edge of his bed, Bill rubbed his eyes with his fists. Tim's mother said:

"Lie down and rest a while, love. It's far too soon for you to get up. Lie down again, there's a good lad."

Bill did as he was told, feeling lightheaded and confused. All he could think of was the model of the *Fury*, sailing in the candlelight. He gazed up into Tim's eyes.

"That boat . . . Did you make it?"

"Yes, I've just finished it," Tim answered eagerly.

"It's like the *Fury*," Bill grew faint again. "I had a boat like that. . . ." The pictures tumbled together in his mind, the boat, the waves, *Dyke House* rocking, pulling loose, and the others . . . What had happened to the others?

Bill sat up again.

"Where are my sister and Gram?" he demanded. Tim bent over him, coaxing him to lie down.

"Out on the cliff, Bill," he said. "They're all right. They've gone to see if anything can be saved."

"Oh. How long have I been asleep?"

"An hour or two. Mr. Marvell and George carried you here. They told us how you brought the *Fury* in, and how you got everybody out of the ravine."

"Bless thee," came from the bed across the room. "Bless thee for a fine, brave lad. Put tha must rest a bit more, love, please do. Everything will be all right."

Bill lay staring up at the ceiling, too weak to stop the tears welling up in his eyes. Tim and his mother had spoken to him kindly. They did not hate him as he was sure they must. But they ought to hate him. Everybody ought to hate him, when he might have saved *Dyke House*. With the money the Professor had given him he could have paid a stonemason to come and patch the wall. That would have been better than building the bulkhead himself. He'd made a mistake thinking the bulkhead would hold till the spring. He should not have spent half of the Professor's

money on buying the *Fury*. But what if he had spent the money to have the wall patched by a mason, and still the storm had undermined it? There would have been no *Fury* for the escape; they would have been trapped in *Dyke House*.

After lying still for half an hour, with his mind racing as he blamed himself and argued with himself, Bill got out of bed again. He found his white boots and, thrusting his feet into them, crossed the room to the door. In the dim light, he saw that he was wearing not his own clothes but a pair of black-sage trousers which hardly reached to his ankles, and the buttoned turtle-necked sweater he had seen Tim wearing a week before. Mumbling something about going to find the others, he glanced back into the caravan room. Tim's mother lay watching him from her bed, and Tim held his rifle from his work table, but they did nothing to stop him. He went out, closing the door behind him. With the pounding of the sea in his ears, he crossed the garden and opened the little gate close to the edge of the ruine. He chose the path to the right and scented a field strewn with clumps of hay and boards and bits of tiles. Soon he heard Tim coming behind him and slowed his steps.

"I say . . ." Tim began before he caught up to Bill. "Your boat's all right. I went down to her. I've unslipped her rudder and bailed her out and . . ." He took a deep breath before he went on. "I think she's a beauty, Bill. I think you're doing a right good job on her."

"Thanks," Bill answered. "Thanks a lot. Was the sail still there?"

"Yes. It was partly wrapped round t mast. It's torn, but it can be fixed, I think. I say, Bill . . ." Tim laid his hand on Bill's arm. "I say, you can have t'nardel of t'*Fury* if you want it. I— I was really making it for you."

"For me? Why?" Bill stared down at Tim's thin face, at his eyes, round and dark as agates behind the thick glasses.



"I don't know, I just thought . . ."

"You must be crazy, making a boat for me!" Bill said gruffly, and then was sorry. In a quick, clumsy motion, he put his arm around Tim's shoulders. "O K, Tim, you can give it to me if you want to. I'd like to have it very much. And I'll let you know when I buy the paint. I'll bet you could do the decorations around the hull better than me. I thought I might make it off-souther, British and American, opposite each other."

The two boys walked on, side by side now, with Tim springing forward, a smile lighting his face. And in spite of his worry about *Dyk House* and the fire which he had not known since he had come to England.

It was cold and chilly on the cliff to which everything was overwhelmed and beat and whirled through the rain. He had stopped in tiny dumps, coming from his school. Bill tucked his chin down into the neck of his sweater.

Some of the men gathered at the edge of the cliff were building a fire-pole, thinking it would light up the ravine below and show them where their *Dyk House* still stood. But Bill sneered over at them. A sheet of spray flew up at him, and then there was only blackness. How could a fire help to illuminate blackness that?

The blackness melted up at us. Faces were crackling and snapping as two sent at fire in a wider circle. The people on the hill moved towards the heat, holding out their hands, crouching in the rain or night. After he had seen that Marie was safe with George, Bill moved in close to the flames and stood with his eyes tight shut. When he opened them, the faces around the fire seemed to be drawn nearer, staring at him.

"Ah, Bill, lad, that's all right again, that's good lad," the faces murmured at him, sad, fearful faces they seemed, and around the blaze a circle of sound grew, like the whirring of wind among autumn leaves, voices whispered, or spoke wonderingly, or cried. Voices talked about death.

There had been an SOS. The lifeboat had been called out a second time, soon after she returned from trying to rescue the boys in the *Fury*. The men in her—Mr. Marvell, George and the others—had seen a Bridlington fishing-boat crash against the cliffs. People said that the fishing-boat's motor had failed and the men aboard her could not rig her sail in time, and could not row hard enough to keep clear of the cliffs till the *Howard D.* could reach her. Some of the people around the fire had lost uncles or cousins. To Bill, weak and tired as he was, the talk sounded unreal. Everything seemed a dream, even the line between life and death. The voices, the faces drawn close, floated around him as if suspended from a hollow corner of sky, and the thumping, the eerie sighing, the pounding of the waves, came from everywhere.

Suddenly Bill caught sight of Gram. He blinked and came to himself, shivering as if someone had drenched him with icy water. Straightening his back, he stared at the little hunched figure seated on a rock out of the ring of firelight. Gram was leaning forward, staring down into the ravine, her arms hanging loosely over her knees. How shrivelled and old she looked! Why had people let her sit there alone like that?

Bill went to her. She gave a start when he touched her, and turned to face him.

"Oh, it's you, lad," she said. "Are you feeling all right? You're up and about again so soon. Are you sure you're all right?" Bill nodded, smiling to reassure her, and she continued, "I've just been sitting here a bit, lad, trying to see . . ." She turned her head back towards the ravine, but quickly hid her face in her hands. Grasping her by the arms, Bill led her gently towards the fire. She stood at his side, with everyone watching her. There were whispers of encouragement, there was a murmur of pity, but Gram only stared into the blaze, smiling slightly, twisting her hands together and pulling them apart, as if they were

covered with some sticky substance. She did not cry, but her lips moved and Bill thought she must be praying. He held his head near hers and heard:

"Oh, if only it's not too late! Don't let it be too late!"

A sickness crept over Bill. He was sure he had seen *Dyke House* being swept away, he was sure he had seen its roof in the whirling water of the ravine. He cried inwardly, "It's too late already; it's sure to be too late!"

He looked down to see Merrie coming to him. He knelt to touch her, as if he could not really believe she was safe and unhurt. She reached out to him, a young sparrow cupped in her hands.

"Look, Bill," she said. He smiled and did not take the bird from her, though he knew it was dead. Merrie moved closer to the fire, holding the sparrow forward in both palms. It was soft and round. Its legs stuck up like stiff little twigs. Its eyes were shut, but its tiny beak was so wide open that Bill could see its throat inside.

"See, I'm warming him," Merrie said. "He'll be all right when he gets warm. He can come and live with Joey and the canaries, can't he, Bill?" Merrie talked quickly. Her eyes were extraordinarily bright and she seemed not in the least tired, though it was nearing midnight. "I found him in the boat," she went on. "He flew right into my lap. He wanted me to take care of him, you see. He — he . . ." She gulped and stopped, breathless from wanting to say more.

The village people were gathered in a tight ring around the fire now. Their clothes steamed as the flames dried them. From time to time, the ones who had lost relatives in the fishing boat gazed down at the sea, or down into Gram's ravine. But gradually everyone saw there was no reason for waiting on the cliff, there was nothing to be done. It would be another five hours till low tide, another six hours before it was light. Slowly, sadly, the people began to straggle away from the fire, along the path

towards their homes. Without a word, Mr. Marvell took Gram's arm and led her away, his two sons, with Bill, Merrie and Tim following. They crossed a farm whose henhouses were destroyed and whose haystacks had blown into the sea, they passed a caravan thrown on to its side in a field, they climbed over trunks of trees uprooted and lying with their foliage thrust out over the edge of Danes Dyke. George held Merrie in his arms now, and Bill walked between Rolf and Tim, listening to Merrie talk on and on about the bird.

"Why doesn't he wake up now? He's warm enough, isn't he? Feel him, how warm he is." But Merrie's head was drooping in weariness. Time after time she closed her eyes and opened them again; and then she slept, curled up against George's chest. The sparrow slipped from her hands and was left behind in the road.

Tim said good night and turned to the left, through some trees to the caravan house, and after that the walk to Flamborough Village seemed to go on and on, endlessly. Bill was more asleep than awake when Mr. Marvell opened the door of his bungalow and Mrs. Marvell put her arms around Gram, exclaiming:

"Liza, love! Eh, love, tha'rt as welcome as ever a body was on this earth!" As Mrs. Marvell helped Gram out of her cape, Bill noticed the seven mugs of cocoa steaming on a tray, and the freshly laundered clothes, his clothes, drying on a clothes-horse before the fire, and the three beds, fashioned of mattresses and pillows, in a row on the floor. Soon Mrs. Marvell was explaining:

"George ran back an hour since to tell me how many would be coming. Liza, thee and t'little chick are to sleep in t'room behind t'kitchen. George and Rolf will sleep here, and Bill as well, if he doesn't mind. Tha sees how easy it works out. Tha'rt not putting us to one bit of trouble, love. And now, hurry and drink thy cocoa. Tha looks tired to death. There's no need to wake t'little one.

I'll just put her straight to bed. And lookee" — Mrs. Marvell noticed that Gram was on the verge of tears and stroked her softly on the cheek — "tha munstn't worry, love. T'lord doesn't miss now! Tha knows he watches every blade of grass, and he's bound to keep an eye on thee as well."

Before ten minutes had gone by, Bill was settling down between the sheets of his narrow bed, wriggling his toes in the warmth of the fire. The talk from the back rooms of the bungalow softened and stopped, and Bill lay wide-eyed in the stillness. After a while he heard Rolf murmur

"I suppose you're wondering why Pete and I chose such a quiet time to take your boat."

"I wasn't thinking about that," said Bill quietly. He was not telling the exact truth. Thoughts of the *Imp* had been coming to him ever since Eun had said he wanted to give him the model boat.

"Well, look . . . I'm right sorry about it now. I've changed my mind about a lot of things. So has Pete," Rolf hurriedly added. "You see it wasn't so wild when we started off. It looked a good smart wind to get us round t'head. We saw you go off to t'village, and we thought we could get her out of t'way before you came back. We knew it was a storm coming, all right, and we were taking a chance, fastening t'sul like that, but we had to get her round t'head and hide her, and t'sul was just right. It used to belong to your grandfather — to t'same boat as that mast you brought down from t'loft. Dad bought it from your Gram at t'auktion."

"At the auction?" Bill wondered aloud.

"Aye, when your Gram sold her furniture."

"I — I didn't know . . ." mumbled Bill.

"You mean she never told you she sold her furniture?" She did it t'week before you came, to get money to take care of you and your sister, like." Rolf spoke in a loud whisper. Bill did not answer, but lay thinking about the

big empty room at *Dyke House*. Then he thought of the terrace, and the wall, and the water driving into the kitchen. What could they do if the house was gone? What would become of Merrie and him, and what would happen to Gram?

"Merrie and I can go back home," he told himself. "We can wire the Professor. He'll send the money for our passage. He'll let us live with him." But he knew as he thought it that he could not leave Gram. He stared up at the fire-shadows on the ceiling and said to himself, again and again:

"The house mustn't be gone! It will break Gram's heart if the house is gone! It must be there! It must be still standing when we go down in the morning!"

In spite of his tiredness, Bill was sleeping only fitfully four hours later when Merrie tiptoed to him. He sat up and put his head against hers, thinking that she had had a bad dream. But she whispered in his ear:

"Bill! Gram's gone!"

## Chapter 20

### EXHAUSTION

**Q**UIETLY, still lying on his cushion bed, Bill reached to the nearby chair for his sweater and trousers. He sat up, pulling his covers loose at one side, and stole barefoot across the room, with Merrie behind him. In the kitchen he turned to her, keeping his whisper steady and calm.

"I'm going to put you back to bed, Merrie. You just stay there and go to sleep, and I'll go after Gram." He led his sister to the room behind the kitchen, and when she was in bed, he put on his clothes and crossed the kitchen to the back door. But there he stopped and went back to her, though his heart was racing, telling him to be off. He stayed with her, running his fingers through her hair till she seemed to be almost asleep, and then crept away, leaving the bungalow by way of the glass porch attached to the kitchen, as Gram must have done, and running through the village, through the silent streets with their tiny passages leading away from them, and out towards the cliffs. It was dark and starless. As he jumped over muddy ruts and holes and scrambled over trunks of fallen trees, branches caught at his clothes and scratched his bare legs and feet.

There was no sign or track now where the familiar ravine path had been. He leaped down the steep cleft of Danes Dyke, jumping from level to level, over rocks and spongy, boggy ground and through tangles of scrub left by the floding. By the time he reached the wood, he was breathing hard. But he went forward without resting,

through mud that smelled of the sea. He fell down and rose up again, his face bruised and streaming with perspiration, and felt his way in the pitch blackness past the dripping undergrowth and the wet tree trunks, towards the bay.

The water was gone from the cleared part of the ravine, but the ground was a network of sodden foliage. Before Bill a huge oak tree, washed away from the wood, lay with its branches splayed out, poking up from the sand. Gram's ravine had turned to a lost valley.

Bill talked aloud to himself as he struggled on.

"I must be wrong. Gram couldn't have come back. She couldn't have got through all this. Maybe she came this far and saw what it's like and went back. I could have missed her if she cut across the fields. It's so dark I could have missed her even on the road."

But Bill found to his surprise that if he worked his way to the left, the sand was soft and smooth, as if swept by a broom, and there were rolling sand dunes. Catching sight of a vague outline on top of the dune ahead, he climbed up. At the summit was the largest of Gram's birdcages, with Joey Budget being dead against its bars.

"Poor Joey," Bill said. "Poor old fellow." He straightened the cage and went on, over rocks and sand, towards the sea. As he walked, he narrowed his eyes, searching for the shape of *Dyle House*.

Suddenly he stopped as if someone had shouted at him. The terrace and the wall were gone. Only chunks of cement, lodged in crazy positions among the stones and rocks, were left. But *Dyle House* stood. Bill stared at it open-mouthed. It was whole, and it stood high on its stone pillars, with its chimneys rising as tall and straight as before. And yet the whole structure seemed on the point of tumbling down. Bill gazed at the ground underneath it. The creek had changed its course. It had cut a new channel for itself, directly under the house, past the pillars



that supported it, under the kitchen and the hall and the big room, across the space that had been Gram's garden, and into the old creek where it wound inland. And it seemed as if the old house must at any moment slide down into the channel under it, and be carried stone by stone into the bay. With the wall and the bulkhead gone, nothing was secure. The sea could rush in at any time. As Bill looked round, even the shadowy cliffs above, so depended upon for shelter from the winds, seemed ready to fall in a great landslide into the ravine.

Straining his eyes into the darkness, Bill searched for Gram. An early morning mist came towards him, passing its cold, clammy hands over him, plucking at *Dike House* with thin fingers, rubbing its walls as if trying to nudge it into the sea. Bill hurried on calling Gram, and his cries mingled with the screams and whistlings of the birds overhead come back to beat the new winds and spiral in bewilderment. He walked to the edge of the old creek, filled with sand now, and back again to the new creek under the house. The tide had been going out for several hours, still there was a frothing, boiling stream in the new creek's bed, licking round the pillars and tumbling in a white path to the bay. How deep and straight the new creek's channel was! When the tide came in, the water would rush through *Dike House* as if it were nothing but a gateway, as it had rushed during the storm!

Dawn was beginning to break. Picking his way over the stones and rubble, Bill saw that at one point across the new creek, the chalk rocks were now scattered as they were elsewhere on the shore, but piled up into a kind of cone. He jumped to the opposite bank and let himself down on one knee. The rocks had been scraped together. There was wet sand in a circle around the pile, and there were the marks of feet and hands. Gram was here. Somehow she had got through.

Callung, Bill ran back and forth along the sea's edge,

sloshing through pools left by the tide, wading into the edges of the waves till they slapped against his thighs. He had the sensation he had had the day he found the *Fury* under the cliffs, and again a few hours before, during the big storm. It was as if at any instant the sea might rush in to trap him, as if a huge wave might suddenly mount mysteriously and crush him, dragging him back with it into the deep water. He stepped higher on to the shingle, climbing over the rocks towards the cliff at the right side of *Dyke House*. As he raised his eyes from the waves he saw Gram poised on a narrow ledge, among the jagged rocks tossed from the cliff side by the hurricane. It was her white hair that made him see her in the mist, her hair and the billowing circle of her cape as she bent to move a boulder, rolling it down on to the tongue of shore between the cliff and the new creek. Bill ran to her, balancing with his bare feet on the pile of rocks she had already made under the ledge.

"Gram! Oh please, Gram, you must come back! You can't save the house like this! What can one or two of us do? It would take a hundred people to fill in that new creek! It will be as swift as rapids when the tide comes in again!"

Gram gazed down at Bill, but she did not take her hands from the boulder she was rolling. Her hair blew in long strands about her face, and the mist came around her so that she seemed to be standing on a sweep of clouds. He jumped up to the ledge and grasped her, shouting at her:

"Come, Gram! You shouldn't have come out alone like this. You'll get hurt. There's not a chance of saving the house this way. The next tide will tear down everything you do! Look how deep the new creek is!"

Bill felt Gram's arms go limp, and saw the look of distress in her eyes. She stared at the shore, at the waves dashing in over the rocks and dividing to surround her ledge. She said with a deep sigh:

"I'm afraid you're right, lad. I was hoping against hope. It was foolish of me to—to try to do it all myself. There's not enough time." She lifted her knobbly, mottled hands, like a person gently begging. 'Not — enough time . . .'. Her shoulders sagged, and she took a step towards the edge of the ledge. Bill was afraid she would fall. He reached out and pulled her back.

"I'd do anything to help, Gram. I should have helped more before. Now it's too late. It's all so — so hopeless. I'm sorry. I . . . Come on, Gram, let me take you back."

Gram bent low, trembling and stumbling, trying to let herself down from the ledge. Jumping on to the shingle, Bill took her in his arms and carried her towards *Dike House*, towards the ravine narrowing under Dunes Dyke. He had to find his footholds very carefully over the shifting, slippery stones, and in looking for safe places to step, he noticed everywhere the skeletons of sea birds, and broken crab shells. And as he plodded back into the ravine he noticed that the wood which had been russet and lovely in its autumn foliage was a toin, barren, winter wood now.

Gram was not much heavier than Mornie, but Bill's arms ached painfully by the time he reached the place where the ravine path had been. He let the old woman climb a distance, and then, sensing from her breathing how exhausted she was, he picked her up again. As he mounted the hillside slowly, step by step, he saw the *Fury* through the trees. She was wedged on her beam ends and he could see, vaguely through the mist, the whole length and breadth of her. For some reason the sight filled him with new energy, and he strode out more quickly, on and on, all the way to Marvells' hungalow. He set Gram down outside the back door, and they crept inside so quietly that no one heard them. In the kitchen, he unfastened Gram's cape, heavy and wet from the waves and the mist, and hung it over a chair. Then he led her back to rest at

Merrie's side, and while she undressed, he went back to the kitchen for a glass of water for her. When he returned, she was lying against her pillow. Her eyes were dull and sunken, and the glow he had seen in her face when he found her on the ledge was gone. He lifted her head and held it as she drank. Then, taking the glass from her, he laid her head back against the pillow. She closed her eyes, and he stood gazing down at her. Her cheeks had grown so hollow and wrinkled, so white. He felt suddenly afraid.

"Gram?" he whispered. She opened her eyes.

"Come here, lad," she said softly. She took his hand, and her tears fell down upon it.

"I—I'm so sorry about the house," Bill faltered. Gram held his hand against her face. With a pause after every word, she murmured:

"Nay, bless thee, love, go back to bed. Tha mustn't trouble thyself any more." But Bill stayed as he was, trying to swallow the lump in his throat, watching Gram close her eyes again. When she lay as still as Merrie at her side, he tiptoed swiftly back through the kitchen and outdoors. He walked through Flamborough Village, and then, as if he were walking in his sleep, he went back to the cliffs, to the blackened spot where the men had built the fire. As he stared over the cliff edge, he could see *Dyke House* in the slowly widening light of the morning. He could see the terrible gouged-out space of Gram's ravine which had been so pretty before, and the new creek, running wild through everything that mattered to Gram and Merrie and him. He dropped down, supporting himself on his arms, and let himself fall flat, with his head at the very edge of the cliff.

"It's my fault, Gram!" he cried aloud. "I should have worked harder! I should have spent Professor's money on the wall, I should have been working every minute to save it!" He dug his fingers into the mud, scraping them against twigs and stones and prickling dead leaves. His

stomach was throbbing and pulling, and it seemed as if the rising in his throat would choke him. He could not feel the rocks bruising his arms and legs, but he could feel and hear the sea under him, the great, cold sea, rolling over every object in its path, tearing at the caves and cuttings in the rock, turning Gram's home into a dismal ruin. His misery brought the sea a hundred times nearer, and made it vivid as a nightmare.

He lay a while, listening. Then he lifted himself to his feet. He was chilled to the marrow of his bones, and sobbing, but somehow, without his willing it, he was beginning to hope again. He began to run back along the cliff, down into the sharp, damp mist of the hollow, down till he reached the rocky stretch where the terrace had been. He began by throwing into the new creek's channel the rocks Gram had left in a pile. They fell into the water and he could not see them. He ran to the second pile Gram had made under the ledge and brought the rocks back, throwing them in on top of the first ones. The new channel, he guessed, was at least six feet deep. There was less than seven hours till the tide would come in and the creek would turn to a swift torrent again - unless he could stop it, unless he could work on and on, as he had never worked before in his life, and forget how tired he was, forget that he had hardly slept at all for a long time.

He looked round him and felt the cold, and saw the bleak, ghosly house and the chunks of broken wall and the new creek and the racing, ragged clouds. With all these to drain his hope away, he rolled up his sleeves, turned his sweater down from his neck, and shouted at the sea that he would not give up, he would work to save *Dyke House* till the waves leaped at him and drove him away!

## Chapter 21

### WILLING HANDS

TWO hours passed. The sun was an orange disk over the water when George and Rolf reached the cliff to the left of *Dyke House* and looked down to see Bill at work. They did not call out to him, and he did not see them run along the cliff edge and disappear in the direction of Flamborough Village. As Bill went on plodding silently back and forth, bringing rocks and dumping them into the new creek, knocks and shouts began to ring through the village. Mr. Marvell gulped his breakfast cup of tea and said to his wife:

"Watch Lizzy, love. See she doesn't try to go out. Make her stay in bed if she can do. She needs a right good rest. And keep an eye on that little mite as well. She'll go on sleeping a good few hours yet, I'll be bound." Mr. Marvell put on his boots and cap and left the bungalow, hurrying from cottage to cottage, gathering together the men who had not gone to sea earlier in the morning. George and Rolf had already knocked at several doors, rousing their friends, and soon a crowd of young people swarmed through the winding streets, growing as it proceeded. This day the Flamborough boys and girls were absent from school. The old men did not go to fish for billet from the rocky ledges of North Landing and Thornwick Bay. Housewives left their dishes unwashed and their beds unmade. Shops did not open, and there was little work done in the fields. At eight o'clock in the morning, the hum of voices rose around the village square, and a crowd of people began to move along the Danes Dyke road. Twenty minutes

later, Bill, panting and perspiring from his work, heard voices and looked back into the ravine. His eyes opened wide and he blinked, thinking he was not seeing correctly. In two's and three's the people of Flamborough came towards the bay, over the dunes and sand drifts not yet dried by the sun. Some of them shouted as they drew near:

"Now then, lad, now then, we're just coming along to lend thee a hand!" They milled round Bill, and shovels appeared as if from nowhere. A dozen men began to shovel sand into the bed of the new creek, from the point where Bill had thrown in the rocks, back under *Dyke House* and still farther, across the sandy desert that had been Gram's garden. Women wearing kerchiefs and aprons, with arms strong and sunburned like the men's, walked back and forth as Bill was doing, bringing rocks from the bases of the cliffs. Rolf and Pete and Tim came to Bill's side, by the murky water of the new creek.

"Shake hands," said Pete. He grinned, his face red with embarrassment. He grasped Bill's hand and worked it up and down as if he were trying to wrench it off. It was his way of saying he was sorry about the way things had been, and glad they were going to be friends now. As Bill shook hands gravely with each of the boys in turn, he saw that Rolf's face was solemn, and that Tim's glowed with a look of pride. Walking side by side, the four boys began to carry rocks to the new creek bed.

"Is Gram feeling better?" Bill asked Rolf, and went on to explain, "I found her down here before dawn this morning. She ought to stay in bed today."

"She's sleeping, I think," Rolf answered. "She woke up a while since and told Mother about coming down here. Mother's taking care of her, and your sister as well."

"Good." Bill and the other boys were at the foot of one of the cliffs now. Bill threw back his head and let his eyes sweep the hollow, from one side to the other. He took a deep breath and exclaimed:

"Gosh, there's some hope now, there's a lot of hope!" He began to work as furiously as before, with Rolf close by him, a new Rolf, eagerly sharing the heavy carrying, using his muscular shoulders and arms to make the work easier for Bill. And Pete was at his other side, his worn slouch cap cocked over one ear, his fuzzy yellow hair sticking out jaggedly around it. He picked up the smaller rocks whenever he could, curling his plump pink hands around them and walking with his liting, bouncing step, toes pointed out. And he talked on and on in his jaunty way, wrinkling his freckled nose. He talked loudly, and kept twisting his cap around and laughing, because some of the Hamborough girls were at work not far away.

The village people saw the boys working together and nodded to one another. No one turned his face away from Bill now, or taunted him about the *Fury*, or whispered about him when he had passed. People looked at him approvingly and thought of Gram. Bill heard some of the women talking as they loosened a boulder from the shingle below the high-tide mark.

"Aye," said one of them, "it would be a poor show if we let Liza Wade lose her home after all she's done for us. I wouldn't be surprised if she hasn't nursed a good ten or twenty of us here."

"Remember poor old Mrs. Long," said another. "I'll never forget how Liza took care of Mrs. Long. She brought her down here and cared for her for months, till t' poor old thing was well again."

"And took care of t'Meager twins when their mother was in hospital. There'll be no family in t'village Liza Wade hasn't helped one way or another over t'vears, bless her. Anybody sick, anybody lonely Liza's been t'one. Nay, I couldn't have stayed home, knowing *Dyke House* was in danger."

After two hours, the tide began to come in, creeping up the shingle a few inches higher with each wave. The



people before Gram's house looked over their shoulders at the current pushing its way into the new creek bed, and went on working harder than before. Bill and Rol brought as many rocks to the creek as the quickest of the teams of men and women. But Bill's head ached as if a weight were pressing against it, and his back hurt each time he bent and rose again. He had never in his life been so tired. He knew he could sink down where he was, he could sleep with ten thousand stones jabbing his ribs. His mind grew hazy with exhaustion, and he dreamed he was a giant marching, carrying sides of mountains in his arms. Then he imagined he was alone in a desert, parched and sweating, going on and on. Then he was on a great waste of arctic snow, with an endless, blinding whiteness stretching out before him. Around him on the shore, the white stones grew monstrous at one moment, and at the next faded before his eyes. Everything swam and washed like the water of the sea. But he bent low, lifted and walked at Rol's side. He had no will except to last out, to keep going till full tide; and so he went on, white-faced but with his chin set and determined.

The others noticed how tired he was. They kept urging him to stop working, and once Mr. Marvell said:

"Come on now, lad, take a rest. Tha'll be dropping with weariness if tha goes on much longer." But Bill only smiled, tossed his damp hair back from his forehead, and worked on. He heard Old Bob say:

"It's a right shame we can't get horses and wagons down t'ravine-side," and Tom Janny answered:

"We shall do it without Bob. We've still a time to go, and t'wind's abated. There'll not be such a high tide today. Aye, but we've a sight to do yet if we're to get it back t'way it was. Come on, everybody, put thy backs into it!"

More than fifty people were at work now, bringing rocks and sand so quickly that there was a constant bumping and pouring sound in the new creek. Groups of boys and

girls crawled on their hands and knees under the house, dragging rocks and buckets of sand after them. As the tide crept higher, breakers began to ride up the creek, whirling the sand from its banks. They struck the layers of rocks where the filling-in had begun and fell back, bubbling and frothing, flooding the hollow place below the dam of rocks and fanning out over the shore. The people before *Dyke House* stopped work to watch. The men leaned on their shovels.

"Looks to me like t'battle's fairly wou!" someone shouted.

"Aye," said one of the older men soberly. "For today it may be, but what about tomorrow and next week, what about t'day t'next big storm comes? What's to happen then?"

"I've been giving some thought to that myself," said Mr. Marvell, "and if tha asks me, it's up to us to consider t'matter a good bit more. We've not done all we can do if we leave *Liza Ward* like this, t'way I look at it."

But the talk was interrupted by a merry cry:

"Here come t'refreshments!" Everybody hurried to the side of *Dyke House* to watch the procession coming forward from the ravine. First, bearing a huge tray of pots of tea, came Trudy Wilcox, the woman who owned the café near North Landing, and behind her came four other women carrying trays of cakes and biscuits. There were shouts of greeting, and some of the people sat down on the rocks while others helped to hand round cups of tea.

Bill walked to and fro serving cakes. But George strolled up to take the tray from Bill, scolding.

"Sit down, lad. I've worked it out that you've been going on a good while longer than twenty hours, with only five hours of sleep—and that's counting t'time you spent at Tim's house unconscious. You go back to t'bungalow and let Mother take care of you. You'll be falling asleep in your tracks if you stay down here."

Bill sat down to drink his tea with Rolf and Pete and Tim, but a moment later he noticed that a crowd was gathering behind the line of rubble where Grani's storm wall had stood. At the centre of the crowd, some of the men were talking earnestly, while Mr. Marvell walked in a semicircle around the front of *Dyke House*. Bill swallowed his tea and moved closer. 'Tom Janny was saying:

"I'll get on to Jim Petrie this afternoon. I'm sure he'll take t'job on. He's just finishing that sea wall over at Robin Hood's Bay. He can bring his equipment straight down here. We'll need to get started right away. There's likely to be another right high tide in ten days' time, and if another storm struck then . . ."

'Aye, but how about t'granite blocks? Can we get hold of them fast enough?" another fisherman asked.

"He has a few tons of them stacked in his yard over in Scarborough as it is," said Tom Janny. "There shouldn't be much trouble there. It's just a question of t'cost. It'll be a hundred pounds for t'blocks alone, I should think, and maybe another fifty or so for t'equipment and transport."

Mr. Marvell raised his hand.

"Never bother about that, Tom. One or two of us have already talked that matter over. We're well on t'way to t'first hundred already, and I dare say there'll be others with an interest in t'project." There was a murmur of voices.

"I want to help!" Bill blurted out. He reddened as he went on, more quietly, "I still have about forty dollars left. That's — uh — about fifty pounds, I think. I'm sorry it's not more. . . ." Other voices rose.

"I don't know but I could spare a pound or two."

"And I."

"Aye, it's a right enough cause. I'll give a pound to it."

"And I." The murmur spread and grew louder. Mr. Marvell smiled his pleasure.

"Tooks like this is to be t'quickest hundred and fifty pounds ever raised in these parts! But what about t'labour? Everybody knows how much labour costs these days. Now I'm willing to come down here afternoons for a week or so, as soon as I've got in my crabs."

'I'll come with thee, John,' said Old Bob.

I'll give a few days to t'job!"

And I—'

"Tha can put my name down, John. I'll give t'three days I have left of my holidays. I'll be hired coming away from t'village, any road."

There were volunteers shouting and running their hands everywhere in the crowd now, and suddenly everyone began to laugh.

'It's a good showing, in fact,' boomed Mr. Marvell. 'We'll build this wall a good eight feet high, and three, second only to t'one at Bird's, and she'll be standing a bit after t'lot of us have gone. I'm sure of that because there's solid rock a few feet under this shingle here. We'll have a good foundation to build on. And over there where t'old creek came in we'll plant a crop of couch grass and sandwort. It'll grow up tough and solid and make dunes. There'll never be another creek coming in around here. There are a lot of new dunes already, further back there. T'storms begun t'work for us.'

'En, Iiza, love,' Old Bob laughed, his eyes turning up as if Gram were perched on *Dyle House's* roof, 'tha'll be right pleased when tha knows what's been going on down here!'

"'By, but it'd do her good to be here this very minute," said another fisherman. 'I'd like to see t'look on her face when she sees what's happened to t'new creek!'"

"And is Iiza n'ot bid, then?" one of the women asked. "Is she too ill to come out, dost'a think, John?" It was then that Mr. Marvell decided

"I'll go get her with t'lorry. I s'ight of what's been done

down here will cure her faster than anything else could! Come along, George, tha can carry t'little girl. And you come along to bed, young Bill."

But Bill refused to leave *Dyke House*. He went back to work with the others as soon as Mr. Marvell and George had left the ravine. The men continued the filling in of the cavity made by the new creek behind the house, while the women went indoors to scrape and sweep and scrub the mud from Gram's kitchen. People worked merrily now, calling out, joking and laughing joyously, as if this were play and not hard work.

Old Bob, carrying buckets of water to the women at work in the kitchen, shouted, "We've all had some rum jobs in our time, but if this here isn't t'best day's work I've ever done, somebody can fasten me to t'sea bottom with John Marvell's crab pots!"

The tide had risen to its height, splashing in a line below where the old wall had stood, when the sound of Mr. Marvell's lorry was heard from the cliff top. The women hurried out of Gram's kitchen to join the men behind the house, and everyone watched Mr. Marvell stride forward, carrying Gram.

Halfway to the house, the big fisherman set her down. Merrie jumped from George's arms and ran to put her arm through Gram's, and the old woman and the little girl walked together, two small, dark figures in the sand, their shadows following them across the dunes. They stopped at the place where the new creek had come in. As Gram turned slowly to look at the people gathering around her, a canary began to sing upstairs, then another, with weak, timid little notes, and Merrie cried:

"It's the birdies, Gram, all the little birdies. They're wanting their dinner!"

Just then, down the hall stairs and through the broken kitchen door, a surly black ball came flying, leaping in a wide curve from the doorsill to Merrie's feet.

"Tumbles! Hey, Tumbles!" Merrie shrieked. She sat down and squeezed the kitten against her, laughing and shouting all at once.

"She was waiting for us, Gram! Oh, Gram, she was here all the time, just waiting for us to come back!" Merrie grew quiet, holding the kitten with a smile of wonder. She seemed to drift into a dream as she sat there gazing out over the sea and pressing Tumbles against her cheek.

Gram's arm went round Bill's shoulders, and her face was bright with joy as she said:

"John told me about the wall, lad. It's to be in a curve, and we shall have a garden out here next spring. We shall plant the flowers in curves between the house and the wall. We shall just fill the space with lupins and columbines and roses and marigolds. And over there by the side, John says they're going to make a foundation for your new boat-house!" To Gram the valley was already splendid, a cornucopia filled to brimming with warm sunshine and sparkling rocks, and *Dyke House* was the most beautiful place on earth. Looking at her, Bill squared his shoulders and forgot that he was aching with tiredness. He felt as light as a bird; he could have burst out singing every song he knew.

But one of the women shook a finger at Gram.

"Eh, Izza, tha'd best be thinking about t'insides of t'house first. There was shingle and sand and silt a foot deep in t'kitchen. We've been in and got most of it out. There've been ten of us in there scrubbing this last hour, and Old Bob running back and forth bringing water. Aye, and we found a fish swimming around in thy kitchen sink and all. But never thee mind. T'organ's all right. We've tried it out. And we've put hot bottle in all t'beds to air them, and we've taken t'covers off t'cushions and put them to steep . . ."

"And there'll be one or two of us coming along

tomorrow morning to help with t'uidying up," another woman said.

"Aye, but come along now," Mr. Marvell interrupted, "back to t'village for a good dinner, love. Eh, and thy Bill's badly in need of a meal and a rest. He's fair dead on his feet. How t'lad has worked!"

As the men shouldered their shovels, George stepped forward with Bill's white boots in his hands.

"Mother thought you ought to be wearing these, lad," he said. "Aye and she was right. Look at your feet, all bruised and bleeding from t'rocks."

Bill took the boots and bent to put them on. His friends were around him, Rolf and Tim and Pete and George. Everyone kept smiling at him, and the people going away stopped and turned, silently watching as Old Bob put his hand on Bill's shoulder.

"Eh, bless thee, tha'll do, tha'll do for a right Flam-borough lad, Billy White Boots," the old man said.

## Chapter 22

### DYKE HOUSE

SOON after dinner, Mr. Marvell drove Gram, Bill and Merrie back to *Dyke House*. When he had left them, they brought the canaries downstairs, fed them, and left them in their places under the kitchen window. Then they went outside to bury Joey Budge. They laid him in a wooden box and carried him to the back of the house, to the corner where one of Gram's chrysanthemum beds had been. After placing a cross of two pieces of drift-wood over his grave, they started back towards the house, with Tumble's following them, pouncing and purring against their ankles.

As they reached the place where the terrace had been, they heard sounds from the ravine, and saw Rolf, Pete, Tim and some other boys bringing the *Fury*, carrying her so high on their shoulders that the light of midday caught the handsome sweep of her hull. They brought her to her old place, and looking at her, Bill found it hard to believe that the storm had ever happened.

"She's your boat now, for good and all," said Rolf. "We shan't ever try to take her away again."

"Nav, she taught us a lesson, she did that!" Pete thrust his thumbs under his belt and grinned a big grin which showed all his teeth.

"Wait a minute. She's going to belong to all four of us, you and Pete and Tim and me." Bill addressed Rolf abruptly, as if he were giving a command. "I made up my mind about that an hour ago."

"Crumbs!" whispered Pete.



"Look here, Bill," Rolf said, "Don't go giving her up so easily. She is yours, you know. We've talked it all over. You got to her first, and paid for her, and that makes her yours!"

"It's nothing to do with that," said Bill quietly. "It's just the way I want it to be. It's all settled."

Pete whispered, "Crumbs!" again, and all the boys stared at Bill in wonder.

It was Rolf who broke the silence.

"Well, in that case I'm catching t'next bus to Bridlington to buy t'black and red paint for her hull, and that nice pair of oars I've seen for sale down near t'harbour front. Who's going with me to help with t'carrying?"

Both Pete and Tim wanted to go. As Rolf led the way back towards the ravine, he called back, "We'll be bringing all t'stuff down tomorrow, Bill, when you've caught up on your sleep. And thanks!"

Only Tim lingered, reaching into the sailing boat's cabin to bring out the model of the *Fury*. He placed it in Bill's hands and waited, shyly watching as Bill turned the little boat around, slowly, with utmost care. Then he smiled up into Bill's face and dashed away after the other boys.

Bill went into the kitchen and stood by the windows, blinking the sleepiness from his eyes and examining Tim's gift again. He heard Gram say:

"Go to bed now, lad. Go along, and we shan't expect to see you till tomorrow morning." He was too tired to reply. With the little boat cradled in his arm, he moved dreamily to the hall door. There he glanced back and saw Merrie throw her arms around Gram.

"Please, Gram, rock Tumbles and me, won't you?" she murmured. And Gram, her face against Merrie's, called after Bill in her sweet, kindly voice:

"Bless you, lad, for all you've done."

Bill went up to his room, put the boat on the chest of

drawers, undressed, leaving his boots on his chair, and climbed into bed. When he felt the cool sheets around him, he yawned and stretched his aching arms and legs. In spite of his exhaustion, his thoughts were very clear. Every word in his mind was definite, as if he were a child reciting a lesson learned by heart.

I've found out what your reason was for wanting us to come over here, Mother, he thought. You wanted us to be with Gram and the others because of the kind of people they are. And Mother, you were right. We're going to get along fine here. Everything's going to be different from now on!

Bill closed his eyes. He thought about how he'd hated leaving America, about how unhappy he'd been in Flam-borough and how, today, everything had changed . . . Suddenly a surge of joy ran through him, tingling to his toes, raising him up, wide awake. The loveliness of Gram's bay showered over him when he looked out, and he cried aloud—it was as if he were shouting to Merrie and his mother and Jim and Professor and Gram and everybody he cared about most.

"Billy White Boots! Old Bob called me 'Billy White Boots'! And I'm going to do everything in the world to be worthy of that!"

He smiled. He laid his head back against his pillow and went to sleep smiling, with one arm reaching out to his boots where they lay glistening in the sun.